TIRUVĀYMOḺI ENGLISH GLOSSARY

VOLUME I

by

(Jñāna Bhakti Bhūṣaṇa)
S. SATYAMURTHI AYYANGAR, GWALIOR

Published with the financial assistance from the Government of India, Ministry of Education & Social Welfare (Department of Education)

A...ACHARYA INDOLOGICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE
...D. SOMANI MEMORIAL BUILDING
...FFE PARADE, BOMBAY 400 005
1981

ANANTHACHARYA INDOLOGICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE SERIES

No. V

General Editor:
K. K. A. VENKATACHARI, Ph.D.

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First Edition: 500 copies

Copies can be had of:

1. Ananthacharya Indological Research Institute
   625, Cuffe Parade, Bombay-400 005
2. The Author, 9-10, Prem Nagar, Gwalior-474 002

PRINTED IN INDIA
AT HOE & CO., THE "PREMIER" PRESS, MADRAS-600 001

THIS BOOK IS

PUBLISHED WITH THE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE OF

TIRUMALA TIRUPATI DEVASTHANAMS

UNDER THEIR SCHEME

"AID TO PUBLISH RELIGIOUS BOOKS".

CONTENTS

Bhakti Movement in South India

The bhakti movement in South India came to the fore during the sixth to the ninth centuries A.D. This was the period in which many mystic poets, both the Nāyaṇmārs of Saivism and the Āḻvārs of Śrīvaiṣṇavism, went about singing the praises of the Lord. They wandered from place to place and composed their hymns in praise of the particular deity in that place.

The subject matter of all Tamil poetry has traditionally been categorised as broadly two—akam and puṟam. Akam (' internal ') is what pertains to the individual and the private, the inner, the introvert. Puṟam (' external ') is what pertains to the public man, king or officer, the outer, the extrovert. Love poetry will come under akam and the poetry of heroism or war under puṟam.

The intense devotion which the Nāyaṇmārs and Āḻvārs felt towards God would normally come under akam. The Vaishnavite Āḻvārs went one step further than their contemporary Nāyaṇmārs thinking of this devotion in terms not so much of man and God as of man and his beloved, whether a child (Periyāḻvār) or a lover (Āṇṭāḷ). The human soul longs for God as a woman for his sweetheart. It is the theme of the Biblical *Song of Songs* but with the roles reversed—not the man singing for the woman but the woman for the man. The parallel to this in western religious literature is the mystical poetry of St. Theresa with its passionate love for Jesus.

Recital of Hymns in Temples

The chanting of hymns in Saivite as well as Vaiṣṇava temples was in vogue long before the time of Rāmānuja. There are inscriptions relating to the reign of Pārantaka I at Lalgudi and Allur in the Tiruchirapalli district from which it is seen that provision had been made for singing the 'Tiruppadiyam' in Saivite

temples.[1] There are similar references in inscriptions dating right from the time of Raja Raja Cola which go to prove that provision was made for the chanting of Tiruvāymoḷi by Tiruvāymoḷi Tēvar in Vaiṣṇava temples.[2] Not only the hymns, Tiruvāymoḷi, of Nammāḷvār but the hymns of other Āḷvārs also were chanted in the temples on particular occasions.[3]

Codification of Hymns

It is an interesting feature of the bhakti movement in South India that the codifications of the Saivite hymns by Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi and of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava hymns, Divya Prabandams, by Nāthamuni were effected more or less about the same period and in the same region.[4] Nāthamuṇi's period must have been around the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth centuries.

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[1] At Lālguḍi and Allūr in the Trichinopoly district are found inscriptions of the reigon of Parāntaka I, providing for Brahmins singing the Tiruppadiyam during the daily service in the temples. Earlier than Parāntaka's reign, in the reign of the Pallava Vijaya - Nandi-Vikrama Varman, reciters of the Tiruppadiyam are enumerated in the list of persons employed in the service of a temple at Tiruvallam.

(*Page 637, The Colas, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri*)

[2] The mention of Tiru-Vāymoḷidevar in an inscription at Ukkal in Rājarāja's reign, and of the recitation of Tiruppadiyam in Viṣṇu temples is enough to show the parallelism in practice between Saivism and Vaiṣṇavism in this respect.

(*Page 639, The Colas, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri*)

[3] The fact that the hymn of Kulaśekhara-āḷvār beginning tettarundiṟal was recited before the deity during three nights in the course of a festival in Srirangam is mentioned in an inscription of A.D. 1088.

(*Page 639, The Colas, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri*)

[4] Tradition confers upon Nathamuni the honour of having done for Vaiṣṇava lyrics what Nambi Āṇḍār Nambi achieved for the Śaiva ones. If Śrīnātha who seems to be mentioned in the Anbil plates may be taken to be the same as the Vaiṣṇava Saint Nāthamuni, his age would be the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth centuries A.D., and this accords well with the other testimony we have, meagre as it is, on the subject.

(*Page 638, The Colas, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri*)

As per the traditional account Nāthamuṇi once heard some visitors to his place from Kurukūr, the birth place of Nammāḷvār, recite a hymn of ten verses from *Tiruvāymoḷi*. He was enchanted by the melody of the hymn. Realising that they were only part of a thousand verses composed by Nammāḷvār, Nāthamuṇi journeyed to Kurukūr in the hope of discovering the remaining verses. At Kurukūr, Nāthamuṇi worshipped Lord Viṣṇu and then repaired to the foot of the tamarind tree under which Nammāḷvār had spent his time, in the hope of having the Darśan of Nammāḷvār. He was disappointed however. Then he started reciting Madhura Kavi's ten stanzas in praise of his guru, Nammāḷvār. When he recited those stanzas 12,000 times, both Nammāḷvār and Madhura Kavi appeared before him and imparted to him the knowledge of the four works of Nammāḷvār. Thereafter Nāthamuṇi stayed on in Kurukūr, meditating upon the Prabhandas, till he was summoned to his native place Vīranārāyaṇapuram by the deity of that place. And in his native place he and his disciples spent their time chanting the hymns.

Apart from tradition, it is now accepted that it was Nāthamuṇi who codified the hymns, Divyaprabandhams, of the Āḷvārs, as mentioned in the Guruparampara prabhāvam.[5]

The Concept of Ubhaya Vedānta

One of the most important contributions of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas is the establishment of the concept of Ubhaya Vedānta, *i.e.*, the equal validity of both the Sanskrit śruti or revealed texts and the Tamil hymns of the Āḷvārs, those who had immersed themselves in God and his qualities.

The history behind the concept of 'Ubhaya-Vedānta' is most significant for it depicts the way in which the hymns of the Āḷvārs came to be considered as Vedānta in Tamil. According to the Acārya Hṛdayam, the Vedas as we know are śruti, *i.e.* what was heard or revealed, and anādi *i.e.*, without beginning or authorship. They are the supreme authority. The Tamil hymns are equally claimed to be "anādi" in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition. They have a 'beginning'. ādi, from the Āḷvārs only in the sense that the latter

[5] Guruparamparā Prabhāvam—Āṛāyirappati, page 120.

were the instruments through which the Supreme Lord, Nārāyaṇa, revealed His will. He says that like 'śruti' which was given by Lord to Brahmā, Divya Prabhandhams were also given by Lord to the Āḻvārs.[6] Āḻvārs started giving equal status to Tamil al ng with Sanskrit. For instance, Kulasekhara Āḻvār in his Perumāḷtirumoḻi refers to Lord as the northern language, Sanskrit, and the poem of sweet joy in Tamil.[7]

Tirumaṅkai Āḻvar in his Tiruneṭuntāṇṭakam describes the Lord as one who is in the form of the sound of Tamil, which has the power of expression and who is in the form of the Sanskrit word, Vaṭacol. It is worthy of note here that the Alvar gives prime importance to Tamil which has felicity in expression and only refers later to Sanskrit without any qualifying epithet for the northern language. In the same stanza, Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār calls the Lord as the mantra of Vedānta, denoting that all the Upanishads describe only Him. From this one can glean that the Āḻvār is attaching equal significance to Tamil, Sanskrit and Vedānta, who is God Himself, the primordial cause of everything.[8]

Maturakavi, a direct disciple of Saṭakopan, says about his ācārya, as "He who composed the stanzas through which the inner meaning of the Veda of the great Vetiyars (Brahmins) is established in my heart."[9]

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[6] Ācārya hṛdayam Cūrṇikai 41,
,, ,, 49.

[7] Antamiḻinpapavinai avvaṭamoḻi yai ppaṟṟaṟṟārkaḷ........

(*Perumāḷ tirumoḻi—1-4*)

[8] intiraṟkum piramaṟkum mutalvaṉtaṉṉai irunilam kāl tī nīr viṇ ptūam aintāy
centiṟattatamiḻiocai vaṭacollāki ticaināṉkumāy tiṅkaḷ ñāyiṟāki
antarattil tevarkkaum aṟiyalākā antaṉaṉai antaṉarmāṭṭu antivaitta
mantirattai manirattāl maṟavātu eṉṟum vāḻutiyēl vaḷalām maṭaneñcamē.

(*Tiruneṭuntāṇṭakam, 4*)

[9] mikkavētiyar vētattiṉutporuḷ niṟkappāṭi yenneñcuḷ niṟuttiṉāṉ
takkacīr caṭakopaneṉ nampikku āḷ pukkakātal aṭimaip payaṉaṉṟē.

(*Kaṇṇinuṇciruttāmpu, 9*)

Maturakavi says that Saṭakopaṉ has mercifully sung one thousand sweet hymns in Tamil, which would make happy the devotees, who forever engage themselves in praising the glory of the Lord.[10]

Yāmuna does not refer to Tiruvāymoḷi as Drāvida Veda, but in Stotraratna he does pay homage to the feet of Vakulābharaṇa, Nammāḷvār, whom he calls the first Ācārya (Stanza-5). Many of Yāmuna's ideas are parallel to those of the Āḷvārs. It includes for instance, a direct translation from Kulasekhara in Stanza 26 of Stotraratna[11].

Guruparampara recoıds that as part of his temple reforms Ramānuja included the chanting of hymns of the Divya Prabandha.[12] The author of Ācārya Hṛdayam has recorded that Rāmānuja used to explain the Brahma-sūtras with the aid of Tiruvāymoḷı.[13]

That the Divya Prabandhas had been accepted by Śrivaiṣṇavas as equivalent to the Sanskrit Vedas as part of regular temple worship is evident from the reference to Nammāḷvar in the Stotras

[10] Aruḷkoṅṭāṭum aṟiyavar iṉpuṟa
aruḷiṉāṉ avvarumaṟaiyinporuḷ
aruḷkoṅṭu āyiram iṉtamiḷ pāṭināṉ
aruḷ kaṅṭir ivvulakinilmikkatē.

(*Kaṇṇinuṇciruttāmpu, 8*)

[11] ar ciṉattāl īṉṟatāy akaṟṟiṭinum maṟṟavaḷtaṉ aruḷ ninainte aḻumkuḻavi atuvē poṉṟiruntēṉē.

(*Kulacekara, Perumāḷtirumoḷi, 5 : 1*)

ruṣā nirastopi śiśuḥ stanandhayaḥ najātu matuḥ carnaṇau jihāsati.

(*Yāmuna, Stotraratna, sta. 26*)

[12] Guruparamparā prabhāvam—pp. 181 ff.

[13] Bhāṣyakārar itukoṅṭu sūtra
vyākhyānaṅkaḷ oruṅku viṭuvar.

(*Āāryahṛdayam—cu-65*)

of some of the direct disciples of Rāmānuja, like Kūresa and his son, Parāsara Bhattar.[14]

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[14] (a) Traividya Vṛdha jana mūrdha vibhūṣanam yat
Sampat ca sātvikajanasya Yadeva nityam.
Yadvā Saraṇyam Asaraṇya janasya pumsām
Tat Samsrayēma Vakuḷābharaṇa anghriyugmam.

(*Śrīvaikunṭha Stavam—2*)
Kuresa

"Let us prostrate before the lotus feet of *Nammalvar*, the only refuge for even the indifferent and the uncared for. Bow before those feet which are simultaneously a unique treasure house for the Sattvikas and an incoparable jewel on their heads."

(*Stanza—2*)

(b) Baktiprabhāva bhavadadbhu ta bhava
Sandhuksita pranayasāra rasougha punah.
Vedārtharatna nidhiḥ acyutadivya dhāmā
Jīyāt paraṅkusa pyodhirsīma bhūmā.

(*Śrī Vaikunṭha Stavam—3*)
Kuresa

"Hail to Nammalvar who competes with the ocean in his qualities of divine love: immeasurable is his love for the Lord, even as the full waters of the ocean. Variegated and most wonderful are the myriad moods of his love for Him (the Nava-rasas even as the ocean contains unheard of treasures) Immortal shall he be who is our and our Lord's pride of possession".

(*Stanza—3*)

(c) Vakuladhara Sarasvatī viṣakta Svararasa bhāvayutasu kinnarīṣu.
dravati dṛṣadapi prasakta gānāsu iha vanaśaila tatiṣu Sundrasya.

(*Sundara bahusṭava*—12)
Kuresa

The very stones melt, when kinnara maidens, who are endowed with perception of swara, rasa and bhava, sing the "Saraswati of Vakuladhara" (hymns of Nammalvar), from the valleys of 'Sundara' hill —(Alakarmalai)".

(d) Ṛṣīm juṣāmahe kṛṣṇa tṛsṇātatvam ivoditam.
Sahasra sākhām yodrāksit drāviḍīm braha Sanyanitam

.(*Śrī raṇgarājastava—6* (*Parāśara Bhaṭṭar*)

"We bow before that saint Nammalvar who perceived the Brahma samhita (Upanishad) in Tamil, having a thousand branches and who is the very personification, as it were, of the thirst for Kisna."

Though Nâthamuni and Āḷavandar were instrumental in introducing the chanting of the Divya Prabandham in Vaiṣṇava temples, it was Rāmānuja who systematised it and arranged for the chanting of hymns as an integral part of the temple ritual. This is borne out by the inscriptions relating to the post-Rāmānuja period.[15] This is also known from the Koyil oḷuku, which is a recorded document on the Srirangam temple routine from the time of Rāmânuja.

The concluding session in Śrīvaiṣṇava daily or special worship, as in the case of a festival of the presiding deity or Āḷvār or Ācārya, has an important item called 'Cāṟṟumuṟai', which marks the end of the recitation of the Divya Prabandham. After the recital of the last two verses of each work of the Āḷvār followed by two verses of Tiruppallāṇṭu, two verses are sung which mean the following: "May the divine command of the venerable Rāmānuja. grow stronger and stronger, with its powers unobstructed in all places and on all occasions and at all times. May the divine command of Rāmānuja shine forth every day and pervade all places, for it aims at the welfare of all the worlds. O Lord, please make the glory of Śrīrangam grow strong every day without any hindrance."[16]

It may also be noted that Râmânuja's systematisation of temple worship is adopted even in domestic worship, which is is followed by Cāṟṟumuṟai. Further, the influence of Rāmānuja

[15] Divyaprabhandha recital in vaisnava Temples.—Dr. K. V. Raman

(*Śrī Rāmanuja Vāṇī—October 1979, pp. 33ff*).

[16] Sarvadèsa sadākāleṣu avyāhata parākramā.
rāmānujārya divyājñyā vardhatām abhivardhatām.
râmānujārya divyājñyā prativāsarm ujvalā.
Digantavyāpinīu bhūyat sāhi lokahitaiṣinī.

(*Śrīmanna Śrīrangaśriyam anupadravā anudinam savardhaya*)

can also be seen in the singing of the hymns of Āḻvārs in marriage ceremonies and in obsequies.[17]

Śrī Nammāḻvār

Śrī Nammāḻvār was born at Tirukkurukūr, also known as Āḻvār tirunakari, in the Vēlālar Community of fourth Varṇa. His parents were Kāri and Uṭaiya Naṅkai. He was given the name, Māṟaṉ by his parents.

It is said that as soon as he was born, he was so absorbed in the contemplation of God that he would not eat or drink but soon took up residence under a tamarind tree and remained there. He radiated a saintly effulgence which could be seen from far and wide. In fact, Matura Kavi who was on tour in the North saw it and hastened to the South, following the direction of the effulgence. He reached the city of the Āḻvār and located the Tamarind tree under which Nammāḻvār was seated. There the meeting took place between these two great souls, Nammāḻvār and Matura Kavi, the latter himself one of the Āḻvārs. Matura Kavi saw with wonder that Nammāḻvār did not take any food or water and would also not talk to anybody. He put the question to him: "A little thing born in a dead body, what will it eat and where will it live?" Nammāḻvār replied: "It will eat that and lie there." Matura Kavi realised that Nammāḻvār meant that though the body is a dead thing and soul infinitely small, it had the capacity to stay in the body and live on it. By this Nammāḻvār sought also to convey

[17] The ten stanzas of "Nācciyār Tirumoḻi" beginning with "Vāraṇamāyiram", where Āṇṭāḷ dreams of her marriage with Lord Nārāyaṇa, are usually sung during the weddings of the south Indian Śrī Vaiṣṇavite community. This may well be taken as an index of the deep penetrative influence of the hymns of Āḻvārs on the social life of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Community.

Before the commencement of funeral ceremonies in (case of death to the members of) the Śrī Vaiṣṇava community when the dead body (prēta) is washed and the caste mark applied, at least a hundred stanzas of Nammāḻvār are chanted. This is done as if to indicate the longing of the individual soul to reach the lotus feet of the Lord. Similarly, at the conclusion of the ceremonies on the 13th day, thousand hymns of Nammāḻvār (*i.e.* Tiruvāymoḻi) are chanted to signify the liberation of the soul.

that emancipated souls, though finite and small, dwell in God and God is their food, wealth, mind, wisdom, bliss and everything. He himself has spoken of service of God as the greatest gift of God, exceeding even the matter of liberation from the cycle of births. The teachings of Nammāḻvār are said to be capable of liberating anyone. His influence on the course of religious history was enormous.

The place of Nammāḻvār in Śrī vaiṣṇavism can be gauged from the fact that he is held to be the most important among the Āḻvārs. When one considers that he was of the fourth *varṇa*, one can understand the height to which a person can rise by the love of God. His very name, Nammāḻvār, our Āḻvār, shows the esteem and affection in which he is held in the Śrīvaiṣṇva community. He is also known as Satakopa, which is a symbol representing the Lord's feet are placed on the devotee's head in reverential worship. He himself had stated: " By becoming servants of the Lord, we have verily become, as it were, His sacred sandals" (Tiruvantāti-31). Besides Tiruvāymoḻi, his other works are: Tiruviruttam, Tiruvāciriyam and Periya Tiruvantāti.

Matura Kavi Āḻvār

The meeting of Matura Kavi and Nammāḻvār has already been described. Nammāḻvār's statement that he was enjoying God, as his food and resting in God made Matura Kavi realise the profound truth in it; then and there he chose Nammāḻvār as his ācārya. He learned all the hymns of the great saint and followed the method of bhakti and prapatti scrupulously. The traditional accounts include him among the Āḻvārs, though with a difference. While all other Āḻvārs enjoyed the mystic vision of God and His infinite auspicious attributes, Matura Kavi sang about the glory of Nammāḻvār alone in his only composition. It is called ' Kaṇṇinuṇ Ciruttāmpu ' in which he sings the praise of Nammāḻvār or Saṭakōpaṉ. The fact that he has been elevated on the strength of this only work, demonstrates the significance of the deep devotion to Ācaryas.

Status of Devotees

Vedānta Desika in the Chapter ' Prabhāva Vyavasthādhikāra' of his work ' Rahasya Traya Sāra ' discusses elaborately on devotees

born in a lower varṇa. He refers to the Purāṇas wherein it has been stated that a devotee, even though of a lower varna, is superior to one of a higher varna who is not a devotee.

Vedānta Desika held firm views on varṇas and the Varṇāśrama Dharma. According to him a person born in a lower varṇa and who is a devotee of Lord Visnu is venerable! This veneration does not make the devotee get the social status of a higher varṇa.. To establish this, Vedānta Desika has mentioned the simile of the Surabhi, Kamadhenu, which furnishes all that people desire, but is still a cow. The same thing applies to the Bhāgavata, who should be venerated but who cannot change his varṇa.

Vedānta Desika discusses about this elaborately in this chapter and cites the cases of Vyādha and Tulādhara. These two, though born in a lower Varṇa and thus ineligible to study the Vedas or teach them, were still able to clarify the doubts of the Brahmins who approached them for clarification on points in the Vedas. Desika says that they were like guides who direct travellers who had strayed into the forest. Vyādha and Tulādhara were important only for guidance but could not became members of a higher Varṇa. As regards Āḷvārs, according to Vedānta Desika, they were of a special category and could not be classified with mortals. In his Guru Paramparāsāram, he calls the ten Āḷvārs as the Navina Dasāvatara, or the new ten incarnations of this Lord.

While discussing the question of Nammāḷvār's birth, Aḷakiya Maṇavāḷa Perumāl Nāyaṉār in his Ācārya Hṛdayamit compares to that of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa Dvāipāyaṇa, Vyāsa, but with a difference. Śrī Kṛṣṇa was born in prison in Matura and was brought up by his foster-mother, Yasoda in Gokulam. Vyāsa was born to Machcha Gandhi and was also not brought up by her. But Nammāḷvār was born in Tirukurukūr. and brought up by his parents. The places of birth of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Vyāsa and Nammāḷvār are also significant. Śrī Kṛṣṇa was born in prison and Vyāsa on the sea-shore whereas Nammalvar was born in a town in a fertile region on the bank of river Tamiraparaṇi.

According to the author of Ācārya Hṛdayam, the principles of Varṇāśrama Dharma cannot be applied to the devotees of the Lord, Those who do so are ignorant and wallowing in darkness. Further

he cites the cases of Tiruppaṇāḷvār, Tirukacci Nampi and Kurumpu Aṛutta Nampi, who were born in lower Varṇas. He also compares Nammāḷvār's case to that of Varahavatara and Kṛṣṇavatāra. In Varāhāvatāra, the Lord incarnated as a boar to redāeem the earth. In Kṛṣṇâvatāra, the Lord was born among the cow-herds to uplift them. In the same way Nammāḷvār was born in a lower varṇa to uplift mankind.

From the above, it will be seen that these two ācāryas approach the matter of Nammāḷvār's birth in a lower varṇa from different angles. Vedânta Desika says that the matter of birth in a lower Varṇa should not be taken into account in the case of Āḷvārs. Aḷakiya Maṇavāḷa Perumāl Nāyaṉār, a younger contemporary of Vedanta Desika says that Nammalvar was born in low varna purposely to uplift mankind, just as in the case of Kṛṣṇāvatāra and Varāhāvatāra.

Commentaries on Tiruvāymoḷi

Upto the time of Rāmānuja, devotees and disciples learned the subtlety and meanings of Tiruvāymoḷi only by word of mouth, in a continuous Ācārya-Siṣya tradition. The first recorded commentary on Tiruvāymoḷi was by Tirukkurukai Pirāṉ Piḷḷāṉ, a disciple of Rāmānuja, who wrote it as per the instruction of his preceptor. I was called *Ārāyirappaṭi.* (Six thousand 'Paṭi's, A paṭi consists of 32 letters.) In fact all the five important commentaries on Tiruvāymoḷi, so far have this suffix 'paṭi' added on to their titles). The other commentaries are briefly described below:

Onpatiṉāyirappaṭi. This was written by Nañcīyar who learned Tiruvāymoḷi from his ācārya, Parasara Bhaṭṭar. This is more elaborate than Arayirappaṭi. In this, Naṉcīyar stresses the importance of the Tamil language as a vehicle for spiritual revelation. Nañcīyar's contribution to Śrī Vaiṣṇavism is important.

Paññır Ayirappaṭi. The author of this commentary is Vāti Keari Aḷakiya Mañavāḷa De'ikara disciple of Periya vāccāṉ Pillai. Almost illiterate in the beginning, he had the good fortune to be blessed with the grace of his preceptor and became erudite and wrote many scholarly treatises, including this commentary.

Irupattinalayirappati. This commentary is written by Periya Vāccāṉ Piḷḷai, a disciple of Nampiḷḷai. Periya Vāccāṉ Piḷḷai's contribution to the Maṇipravāḷa Literature is significant. Because of his methodical and systematic approach in his treaties, he was given the title 'Vyakhānacakravartin', emperor of commentators.

Muppattiārāyirappaṭi. Of all the commentaries of Tiruvāymoḻi, that have gained prominence so far, this is considered to be the most exhaustive. This is also known as 'ĪṬU' and is held in high esteem by Śrīvaiṣṇavites. The author of this commentary was Vaṭakku Tiruvīti Piḷḷai, another disciple of Nampiḷḷai. This is supposed to have been recorded after listening to the discourses of Nampillai. This work is accepted as a scripture by all Tenkalai Śrī vaiṣṇavas and the followers of Ahobila Mutt of the Vaṭakalai tradition.

Acknowledgement

It is our duty to acknowledge with grateful thanks the literary and financial help received from diverse sources in the presentation of this work. Mr. S. Satyamurti Ayengar, Retired Officer of the Indian Audit Department, is deeply interested in Śrivaiṣṇava tradition and has undergone "Kālakshepam" with Srī U. Ve. P. B. Annangarāchariār Swami among others. The English Glossary of Tiruvāymoḻi, which we are presenting is a good example of the traditional approach.

As a supplement to the first volume, we are presenting a booklet by Prof. David Kaylor and Dr. K. K. A. Venkatachari entitled, "God far; God near"—An Interpretation of the Thought of Nammāḻvār, which is a critical appreciation of the original text of Tiruvaymoli and the philosophy found in the hymns as seen by these authors.

A munificent grant by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, has been vital for publishing this work and the Institute is thankful to the Government for enabling us thereby no foster the pursuit of research and study in Indology. We are thankful to the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, who, as ever, have come forward to our aid with financial assistance. To Prof. David Kaylor, our thanks are due not only for intellectual but also financial participation in the publication.

We are thankful to Sri B. D. Somani of West Coast Paper Mills for supplying us the required paper at concessional rates. We owe our thanks to Mr. J. Mohan for painstaking proof reading and to Hoe & Co. Madras, our printers, who through the able Mr. V. Sethuram and his devoted staff have spared no pains is seeing to the timely and fine execution of printing.

Bombay.
7th February, 1981.

K. K. A. VENKATACHARI,
Founder Director.

TAṈIYAṈ

(1) [*Invocation by Śrīman Nāthamuni]

Bhaktāmṛtaṁ viśvajana anumodanaṁ
Sarvārthadam Śrī Śaṭhakopa Vāṅgmayaṁ
Sahasra śākhopaniṣad samāgamaṁ
Namāmyahaṁ drāvida Veda Sāgaraṁ.

Translation

Worship do I the Ocean of Tamil Vedas,
The aggregate of the Upaniṣads, having thousands of branches, spelt out by Śaṭhakopa,
The ambrosia for God-lovers,
Which regales all alike [the denizens of the Universe as well as the Supreme Lord, the granter of all felicities]

Note

Tiruvāymoḷi is likened to an ocean. Once upon a time, the ocean was churned and the ambrosia, that came up, was offered to the Devas, the Lord's devotees. Likewise, Tiruvāymoḷi feeds the devotees with the nectarean sweetness of its contents. Again, the ocean delights the beholders, one and all, any length of time. Similarly, Tiruvāymoḷi, the 'Drāviḍa Veda Sāgaraṁ', regales one and all in the whole Universe, from the Supreme Lord downwards, without satiety.

* Invocations (Taṉiyaṉ) (1) to (6) comprising one Sanskrit Śloka and five Tamil verses, composed by the devotees of Saint Nammāḷvār, do not form part of the Text of Tiruvāymoḷi, as such, but are, as a rule, recited at the commencement of the chanting of Tiruvāymoḷi.

(2) [Invocation by Īśvaramuni]

Tiruvaḻuti nāṭeṉṟum Teṉkurukūreṉṟum
Maruviṉiya vaṇporunaleṉṟum — arumaṟaikaḷ
Antāti ceytāṉaṭiyiṇaiyē eppoḻutum
Cintiyāy neñcē teḷintu.

Translation

My mind! thou shalt, for ever, contemplate, as your sole refuge,
The feet of the one [Saint Nammāḻvār], who rendered the abstruse Sanskrit Veda, in lucid Tamil verses,
Skilfully composed, adoring, as well, his birthplace, namely,
Teṉkurukūr, in the region called *Tiruvaḻuti* and the exhilarating river *Tāmraparṇi* on whose bank it stands.

(3) [Invocation by Coṭṭainampi]

Maṉattālum vāyālum vaṇkurukūr pēṇum
Iṉattāraiyallātiṟaiñcēṉ — taṉattālum
Ētum kuṟaivilēṉ — Entai Caṭakōpaṉ
Pātaṅkaḷ yāmuṭaiya paṟṟu.

Translation

Leaning, as I do, on the feet of Śaṭhakopa, my Sire,
I am above wants; I shall adore none
But those whose mind and mouth venerate *Tirunakari*,
His birth place.

(4) [Invocation by Aṉantāḻvāṉ]

Ēynta peruṅkīrtti yirāmānuca muṉitaṉ
Vāynta malarppātam vaṇaṅkukiṉṟēṉ — āyntaperum
Cīrār Caṭakōpaṉ Centamiḻvētam tarikkum
Pērāta uḷḷam peṟa.

Translation

I adore the comely feet of Saint Râmānuja of unrivalled fame,
So as to acquire a mind which shall stand rivetted to the Chaste Tamil Vedas,
Yielded by Caṭakōpan, the repository of all auspicious qualities,
Absolutely free from all blemishes.

(5) and (6) [Invocation by Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar]

Vântikaḷum cōlai matiḷaraṅkar vaṉpukaḷmēl
Āṉṟa tamiḷ maṟaikaḷāyiramum — Iṉṟa
Mutaltāy Caṭakōpaṉ — moympâl vaḷartta
Itattāy Irāmānucaṉ.

Translation

Caṭakōpaṉ was the mother, who yielded the Tamil Vedas, in a thousand stanzas, extolling the glory of *Araṅkar* (Lord Raṅganātha), Enshrined in the walled city of Śrīraṅgam, surrounded by luxurious orchards;
Râmânuja is, however, the beneficent foster-mother,
Who sedulously nurtured these songs and made them flourish in our midst.

Mikkaviṟai nilaiyum meyyâmuyir nilaiyum
Takkaneṟiyum taṭaiyāki — tokkiyalum
Ūḷviṉaiyum vāḷviṉaiyum Ōtum Kurukaiyar Kóṉ
Yāḷiṉicai vētattiyal.

Translation

The tuneful songs of Tiruvāymoḷi of Vedic excellence,
Composed by Nammāḷvār, the chieftain of Kurukūr,
Elucidate the *nature of the Supreme Lord.*
The *nature of the eternal soul* (*Jīvā*), *the means for attaining the Lord,*
The end or the final goal and the impediments thereto.

Note

These five topics dealt with in Tirumantra, (Aum Namo Nārāyaṇāya) are elaborated upon, time and again, in Tiruvāymoḻi. The Lord is Supreme, the individual souls are His sole servitors, loving surrender unto His Sweet grace, the sole means of attaining Him, the deceitful knowledge, resulting in the individual soul straying away into the domain of sensual pleasures through the media of the foul bodies, constitutes the impediment to the attainment of the Lord, service to the Lord, without break or blemish, is the ultimate goal.

VOLUME I

Tiruvāymoḻi

First Centum – First Tiruvāymoḻi (I-1)
(Uyarvu aṟa Uyar Nalam)

Note

This work comprises ten centums, or hundred decades, each of which is called a 'Tiruvāymoḻi', which means 'Inspired utterance' as well as 'Divnie speech', the speech from the holy mouth of the Saint. This is a skilled poetic composition in which each stanza begins with the closing word of the previous stanza or the phonetic sound thereof. Unlike the other hymns of the 'Divya Prabandha', Tiruvāymoḻi is accorded the special status of being chanted only inside the temples or at homes when the Deity is seated for congregational worship, and not when the Deity is taken out in the streets in ceremonial procession.

Preamble

In the opening song, the Saint exhorts his chastened mind to adore the dazzling, distress-dispelling feet of the Lord, the Supreme Benefactor, and attain salvation. Right at the very start, and that too in the opening line itself, the Āḻvār characterises God as one with perfections, all of the nature of bliss and love, the natural repository of innumerable auspicious traits of unlimited dimensions and thus easily scores over the 'Upaniṣad', which made a futile attempt to gauge the immeasurable bliss of the Supreme Lord and had to acknowledge defeat.*

Such a beginning is the natural corollary to the manner in which the Lord captivated the Āḻvār. It was by exhibiting His innumerable auspicious qualities that the Lord attracted

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* Yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasāsaha.

the Āḷvār, and therefore it was that he began with an ardent adoration of those very qualities, literally strangling those philosophising on a God devoid of form, attributes etc. as the illustrious Kūrattāḷvāṉ would put it. Exulting over the fact that we have, on Saint Nammāḷvār's authority, a God of attributes, which ought to silence all those who philosophise on a God devoid of attributes, Kūrattāḷvāṉ would say Viṣṇupurāṇa (VI-5-84) corroborates this: it says the Lord is the essence possessing all blissful perfections. Does not Karṇa say, in the Bhīṣmaparva of the Mahābhārata, that even if all the worlds were assembled together and they were all to praise the perfections of the great victorious Viṣṇu (born as Kṛṣṇa, son of Vasudēva, bearing the discus, conch and sword) for millions of years it would not be exhaustive ? Did not Tārā tell Vāli, her husband, that, in Rāma, the noblest glories meet? Again, did not the subjects, assembled in King Daśaratha's court, proclaim that in all the earth none possessed the excellence of Rāma who, richly blest with graces, was to their hearts very dear? In the eleventh verse of his ' Stotra Ratna ', Saint Yāmuna describes the Lord as one possessing an infinitude of super-excellent, auspicious perfections, conformable to His divine character ".

It may, however, be questioned how the Āḷvār relegated himself to the lower order of submission to the Lord through an appreciation of His auspicious traits instead of being automatically linked up with the Lord by virtue of the inherent trait (Śeṣatva or servitude) of the Individual Soul, as His eternal servant. Actually, it is not a case of relegation, as such, and it has to be taken that all the noblest qualities that converge in the Lord constitute yet another tangible source of attraction for the individual soul. That there has been no departure from the basic stand of Master-servant relationship between the Lord and the Āḷvār is brought out clearly in the fifth centum, third Tiruvāymoḷi, fifth stanza (indicated here and elsewhere by the notation V-3-5). There, in a moment of desolation caused by the snapping of his communion with the Lord, Nammāḷvār bitterly reproaches the Lord as extremely selfish, unsympathetic, elusive, time-serving, deceitful, unfathomable etc.

and yet he finds his 'tyrannical' mind clinging to the Lord, as the Sole Refuge, under all circumstances. The examples of Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā can also be brought in here, to clarify the stand of the Ālvār. According to his own admission to Hanumān when Lakṣmaṇa first met him in the mountain slope of Ṛśyamūkha parvata,* Lakṣmaṇa was enthralled into serving Śrī Rāma and following him, even in exile, by the latter's sweet qualities. This does not, however, detract from Lakṣmaṇa's basic stance. Being an incarnation of Ādiśeṣa (first servant), Lakṣmaṇa was devoted to Rāma, right from the cradle.†

And in the above context, Lakṣmaṇa merely adduced yet another consideration for his constant attendance on Rāma. Service unto the Lord by virtue of the essential nature of the individual soul (Śeṣatva), not conditioned by any extraneous consideration or inducements is, no doubt, of primary importance and all else is relegated to a secondary place. At the same time, it has to be noted that the Lord and His excellence can never remain apart. Felicitating Sītā on her fidelity to her husband (giving up the Palace and all its wealth and relatives and following Rāma into exile), Anasūyā Dēvī, wife of Sage Atri, exhorted that the husband needs to be venerated as God Himself, be he in town or wood, well or ill. Swayed by modesty, the bashful Sītā stood with down-cast eyes and spoke out: "My love for Rāma is spontaneous and yet, people are likely to construe that I love him because of his excellence, both physical and mental. It is indeed difficult for me to prove that my fidelity to Rāma has no strings attached to it and stands by itself without any external provocation or inducements, as Rāma and his excellence can never remain apart. My fidelity will remain constant even if he were the exact reverse of what he is".

The philosophy of 'Tattva' (truth), 'Hita' (Path) and 'Puruṣārtha' (goal), elucidated in this work, is presented in a summarised

* "Ahamasyāvaro bhrātā guṇair dāsyaṁ upāgataḥ".

† Bālyāt prabrti susnigdha.

form, in the opening stanza itself, by indicating that 'Tirumāl' (Mahāviṣṇu) is the Supreme Lord, worshipping His lustrous feet, the Supreme path, and attainment of those very feet, through His redemptive grace, the highest goal. What a grand start, going straight to the subject on hand! Of the five-fold manifestations of God, namely, 'Para', Vyūha', 'Vibhava', 'Antaryāmi' and Arcā', this decad deals with the 'Para' or the transcendental Form of the Lord and the cognate activities.*

* Actually, the first two decads of this great work embrace all that has been said in all the four cantos of the 'Brahma Sūtras', (the Mīmāmsaka Śāstra, already referred to in the Introduction), elucidated in Śrī Rāmānuja's Śrī Bhāṣya. The first six songs of the first decad cover the first Adhyāya of the Brahma sūtras, the next five songs of that decad convey the contents of the second Adhyāya of the Sūtras, the first eight songs of the second decad (Viṭumin) embrace the third Adhyāya of the sūtras and the next three songs of that decad summarise the fourth and the last canto of the Sūtras. Again, decads three to hundred of Tiruvāymoḷi only elaborate what is already set out in the first two decads.

BOOK I

First Centum—First Decad

Uyarvu aṟa uyar nalam Uṭaiyavaṉ evaṉ? avaṉ,
Mayarvū aṟa mati-nalam aruḷiṉaṉ evaṉ? avaṉ,
Ayarvu aṟum amararkaḷ atipati evaṉ? avaṉ
Tuyar aṟu cuṭar-aṭi toḻutu eḻu eṉ maṉaṉē. (I–1–1)

Translation

My mind, lift yourself up to the dazzling, *distress-dispelling* feet of the One, who is the Lord of the ever alert *Eternal Heroes,* who is the natural repository of super-excellent traits which cut out all fatigue, and who unto me vouchsafed *wisdom-love*, ridding me of *ignorance*, leaving no trace of it behind.

Notes

(i) *Distress-dispelling feet*: Tradition has it that this has a pointed reference to the comely feet of Lord Devarāja, enshrined in Śrī Hasti Śailam (Kāñcipuram). Whereas all the other Ācāryas before Śrī Rāmānuja interpreted this phrase as " The feet that relieve the distress of the yearning votaries ", Śrī Rāmānuja held that the Lord's feet relieve His own erstwhile distress over the sad plight of His subjects, sunk deep in the miserable mire of 'Samsāra', the dreadful cycle of birth and death, after relieving the distress of the latter.

(ii) *Eternal Heroes*: The 'Nitya Sūris', Ananta, Garuḍa, Viṣvaksena and other celestials, ever alert in the Lord's intimate service in Yonder Heavens, and ever free, in the sense that they never passed through the gruelling mill of 'Samsāra' the cycle of birth and death.

(iii) '*Matinalam*' in the original text means 'wisdom-love' which can be expanded as follows:

(*a*) God granted me 'wisdom' as well as 'love'.*

* Bhakti rūpāpanna Jñāna or intellectual love of God.

(*b*) The second interpretation ascribed to Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar is: "God gave me loving wisdom or wisdom partaking of the nature of love to God, vigorous from the very root like the '*Karuṅkāli*' (a heavy wood-*Acasia catechu*). Whereas, in the case of others, love of God is a growth from acts of virtue, in the case of the Āḻvārs, such love was induced in them by God's spontaneous grace, and love to God, in this context, is none other than the heart and mind, perfectly blended and attuned to the loving service of God.

(*c*) Queried whether Nammāḻvār was one characterised by love to God (bhakti) or characterised by surrender to the will of God (prapatti), the great preceptor, Empār, replied that the saint had surrendered his will entirely to God and that love to God, in his case, was merely a habit by which he sustained himself, very different from the generality of us, who, while ostensibly resigned to His will, seek employment, too, for obtaining food, etc. In the Saint's case, Lord Kṛṣṇa was unto him everything—food, drink and every other luxury.

(iv) *Rid of ignorance*: Clear-cut knowledge, absolutely free from non-apprehension (*ajñāna*) or the error of mistaking the body for the soul, wrong apprehension (*anyatha-jñāna*) or the error of owing allegiance to other than the Supreme Lord (minor deities) and '*viparīta-jñāna*' (mis-apprehension or inverted apprehension), the error of thinking that the individual soul is the independent master and can enjoy itself (like the *kaivalya* class) whereas it is the sole servitor of the Lord, in whom vests the inviolable right to enjoy the former—such blemishless knowledge was dowered on the saint by the Lord's free Grace—an act of Grace galore!

Maṉaṉ-akam malam aṟa malarmicai eḻutarum
Maṉaṉ-uṇarvu aḷavu ilaṉ, poṟi-uṇarvuavai ilaṉ,
Iṉaṉ uṇar, muḻu nalam, etir nikaḻ kaḻiviṉum
Iṉaṉ ilaṉ, eṉaṉ uyir, mikunarai ilaṉē. (I–1–2)

Translation

The Supreme Lord, peerless at all times, past, present and future, the embodiment of bliss and knowledge in their perfection, much beyond the grasp of the senses, outside the ken of comprehension of even the thoroughly cleansed mind of the Yogi, He is my good soul. O my mind, lift yourself up to the dazzling, distress-dispelling feet of such a Great One.

Notes

(i) In the first stanza, it was said that there was none above the Lord. The doubt might, however, arise whether He has any equal and now it is declared that He has no equal either.

(ii) It might sound strange that the Lord is beyond the comprehension of even the 'Yogi', with a thoroughly cleansed mind; the fact is, even he can comprehend Him only as infinite and immeasurable, free from the limiting adjuncts of the other two entities (Tattvas), namely, 'Jîva' (individual soul or 'cit', that which perceives) and matter ('acit', that which does not perceive).

Ilaṉ atu, uṭaiyaṉ itu: eṉa niṉaivu ariyavaṉ;
Nilaṉiṭai vicumpiṭai uruviṉaṉ, aruviṉaṉ;
Pulaṉoṭu pulaṉ alaṉ, oḻivu ilaṉ; paranta an
Nalaṉ uṭai oruvaṉai naṇukiṉam nâmē. (I–1–3)

Translation

Could He be said to possess that one and not this other thing? No, He pervades, without intermission, the entire Universe, the region high up as well as those below the earth at all times; He abides in all non-sentient things (matter), having form and size as well as the formless sentient beings within them all (individual

souls), and He is yet beyond the grasp of the senses. Blessed are we to have attained Him of peerless glory!

Notes

(i) The Lord was revealed in the first stanza, in His transcendental glory in the High Heavens and He is now described as the all-pervasive Internal Controller, dwelling in the heart of every one, even on this side of heaven, the land of dark nescience, for the sustenance of His '*līlā-vibhūti*' or the sportive universe.

(ii) Notwithstanding the king's sovereignty over the entire land, he and his royal consorts lovingly raise orchards and flower gardens as a matter of recreation, and tend them with special care. The sportive universe (*līlā vibhūti*) is a similar creation of the Lord, raised and retained at His volition.

Nām avan̲ ivan̲ uvan̲, avaḷ ivaḷ uvaḷ evaḷ,
Tām avar ivar uvar, atu itu utu etu,
Vīm avai ivai uvai, avai nalam, tīṅku avai,
Ām avai, āyavai, āynin̲ṟa avarē. (I–1–4)

Translation

We, the masculine beings over here, as well as those at a distance, near at hand and in between, the feminine species similarly situated, all things collectively seen here, there and everywhere, what can be individually pointed out as this, that and the other, the non-sentient things, good, bad, perishable and imperishable, things that were, are and will be, all these subsist in Him. (In other words, all these are sustained, directed and controlled by him).

Avaravar tamatamatu aṟivu aṟi vakaivakai
Avaravar iṟaiyavar en̲a aṭi aṭaivarkaḷ;
Avaravar iṟaiyavar kuṟaivu ilar; Iṟaiyavar
Avaravar vitivaḻi aṭaiya nin̲ṟan̲arē. (I–1–5)

Translation

Different grades of people, with varying degrees of spiritual knowledge and calibre, seek favours from minor deities (*Agni*,

Indra etc.) whom they propitiate as their God. If those deities, in turn, bestow the boons sought by their votaries, to the extent deserved by them, it is *only through the grace of the Supreme Lord*, (*Śrīman Nārāyaṇa*) who stays inside these deities (as their internal *controller*) and maintains them.

Notes

(i) The śāstras proclaim that the Supreme Lord (puruṣōttama) alone is the granter of all felicities and destroyer of all evils.*

(ii) But for the influx of the requisite power from the Supreme Lord, which maintains the minor deities in their respective positions of authority, the minor deities, by themselves, would be incapable of extending favours to their votaries and vouch-safing protection to them; if they did, all by themselves, it would indeed be just as miraculous as the earthen elephants and horses, stationed in battle array, in the precincts of the petty pagodas of demi-gods (*Śāsthā*), on the outskirts of villages and towns, actually going to battle—a veritable impossibility!

Ninṟaṉar iruntaṉar kiṭantaṉar tirintaṉar,
Ninṟilar iruntilar kiṭantilar tirintilar,
Enṟum ōr iyalviṉar eṉa niṉaivu aṟiyavar;
Enṟum ōr iyalvoṭu niṉṟa em tiṭarē. (I–1–6)

Translation

We have it on the firm authority of the Vedās, that it is our Supreme Lord, who controls and sustains the different postures of standing, sitting, lying and wandering about, of one and all, as well as their abstinance therefrom, Himself being immutable (undergoing no change whatsoever) and yet beyond specific scrutiny and comprehension.

* "Na sampadam samāhare vibhatām vinivartane, samartho dhriśyate Kaścit tam vinā Puruottamam."

Notes

(i) In stanzas 4 and 5, the Supreme Lord was shown to be the Sole Architect and Sustainer of the created world of differences (*līla vibhūti*) and now, in this stanza, He is declared to be the cause of motion as well as rest- '*pravṛtti*' as well as '*nivṛtti*'.

(ii) To a poser whether God, on Whom all our actions or motions are said to be dependent, is again required to bring our activity to rest, Empār replied in the affirmative and brought home the point by citing the example of sage Viśvāmitra, who had pushed King 'Triśaṅku', bodily, on to *Svarga*, arresting his fall therefrom and making him stay mid-way in the process.

Tiṭa vicumpu, eri, vaḷi nīr, nilam ivaimicaip
Paṭar poruḷ muḻuvatum āy, avai avaitoṟum
Uṭal micai uyir eṉak karantu, eṅkum parantuḷaṉ:
Cuṭar miku curutiyuḷ ivai uṇṭa curaṉē. (I-1-7)

Translation

The Supreme Lord, enshrined in the shining śruti (scriptures-Vedās) is the Material cause of the basic elements of '*ākāśa*' (ether), air, fire, water and earth, which combined to usher in the worlds, with a vast variety of colours and forms; He pervades them all, in and out, like unto the soul inside the body and remains invisible; He contains them all inside His stomach (during the period of deluge).

Note

The preceding stanzas, which declare that God is all-in-all, might smack of monistic philosophy, making it out that God is the one and only entity from whom all things emanated, which are thus merely His manifestations. Now it is clarified that the Lord is apart from the non-sentient things and sentient beings and enters them all as 'Antaryāmin' (Internal Controller), like unto the soul inside the body, an enunciation based on no less than the authority of the

scintillating Vedās. (*Herein lies the key to the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy*).

Curar aṟivu-aru nilai viṇ mutal muluvatum
Varaṉ mutalāy, avai muḷutu uṇṭa paraparaṉ
Puram oru mūṉṟu erittu, amararkkum aṟiviyantu,
Araṉ ayaṉ eṉa, ulaku aḷittu amaittu uḷaṉē. (I–1–8)

Translation

The Supreme Lord is beyond the comprehension of even Brahmā and other *Curar* (Devas); He is the material cause of the primordial matter, the other elements and all that exist, and safeguards them all inside His Stomach during the period of deluge; He is the one who (functioning through Śiva) destroyed the three unique flying citadels. He is the propagator of knowledge to the *Amarar* (Devas) through Brahmā; He creates the worlds and dissolves them through *Ayaṉ* (*Brahmā*) and *Araṉ* (*Śiva*) standing within them (as their Inner Self).

Note

It has been made out in the preceding stanzas that (1) Lord Mahāviṣṇu is the Supreme Lord, proclaimed, as such, by the Vedās and (2) He is the Soul of all that exist, controls their creation, sustentation and dissolution. All these might appear to be one-sided, displaying a marked partiality for Mahāviṣṇu, ignoring the claims of the Stalwārts like Brahmā, Rudra and other powerful Devas, who have to their credit several achievements, such as creation of the worlds and dissolution thereof, destruction of the flying citadels of the three tough demons, etc. By way of dispelling the superficial belief and knowledge that Mahāviṣṇu is but a co-functionary, on a par with Brahmā and Rudra, that Mahāviṣṇu has the limited function of sustentation only, while the other two are the sole monarchs of their respective fields of creation and dissolution, it is now stated that all the three functions vest in Mahāviṣṇu alone, who gets them discharged through the appropriate authority. Śvetāśvatāropaniṣad clarifies that Brahmā emerged from the lotus flower that blossomed on the stalk sprouting from

Mahāviṣṇu's navel and was imparted by Him, the requisite knowledge of the Vēdās to carry on the work of creation and disseminate the Vēdās to others. As regards the function of dissolution, Rudra and Yama have their own limitations which Mahāviṣṇu transcends as their Inner Self, sustaining, directing and controlling them all.

Uḷa̱ṉ eṉil uḷa̱ṉ, ava̱ṉ uruvam iv uruvukaḷ;
Uḷa̱ṉ ala̱ṉ eṉil, ava̱ṉ aruvam iv aruvukaḷ;
Uḷa̱ṉ eṉa, ila̱ṉ eṉa, ivai kuṇam uṭaimaiyil,
Uḷa̱ṉ iru takaimaiyoṭu, oḻivu ila̱ṉ parantē. (I–1–9)

Translation

Be it said (as *the theists say*), "He is," or (as the *atheists say*) "He is not", (both ways) His existence is established. He exists, at all times and in all places together with the aggregate of the formless sentient beings and the non-sentient things with shape and size, both in the gross state (embodied and therefore visible) and in the subtle state (disembodied and therefore objectively imperceptible).

Notes

(i) The theists (Vaidikas) are those, who subscribe to the authority of the Vēdās;

(ii) The atheists (Nāstikas) are those who deny the existence of God. Denial can and ought to be only with respect to a thing, which forms the subject of such denial. That thing should be there, at least notionally, as 'nothing', as such, does not warrant denial, rather needs no denial. Thus, this stanza cuts across the exponents of 'Śunya Vāda' or the doctrine of nothingness. The Upaniṣadic text '*asat* vâ idamagra āsīth' refers to the invisible subtle state (too subtle to be visible), when this world which forms Brahman's body was gradually reabsorbed into Brahman, each constituent element being refunded into its immediate cause. The word 'asat' italicized in the text, does not connote a state of nothingness or non-existence but the 'subtle' state as distinguished from the gross or visible, manifest state.

Paranta taṉ paravaiyuḷ nīrtoṟum parantuḷaṉ
Paranta aṇṭam itu eṉa: nilam vicumpu oḻivu aṟak
Karanta cil iṭantoṟum iṭam tikaḻ porultoṟum
Karantu, eṅkum parantuḷaṉ; ivai uṇṭa karaṉē. (I–1–10)

Translation

The Lord pervades every little bit of the oceanic waters, cool and sprawling (and yet does not feel cramped but, on the other hand), He feels as easy there as in the expansive world outside. Either on earth or the upper regions (in the whole universe) there is no place where He is not immanent, dwelling, as He does secretly, in the heart of all things and being however minute, and in all places (imperceptible to the things and beings pervaded by Him ever firm and eternal). He is the Lord, who contains them all within Himself, during the period of deluge (in the state of dissolution).

Notes

(i) The Individual Soul, of the size of a minute speck, pervades the body it gets into, only by dint of its attributive consciousness; in the very nature of things, it cannot be co-extensive and co-expansive with the body it occupies, like God, who is omnipresent, not being conditioned by any limiting adjuncts of the other two entities, namely, spirit (Jīva) and matter.

(ii) The doubt as to how the Lord can pervade the inside out of the Individual Soul, of the size of a mere speck (sub-atomic) gets automatically resolved, seeing that the Lord, in but a juvenile form, contains all the worlds during the period of deluge—if the golden stomach, which devoured all the butter stored up by the damsels in the pastoral village of Gokul, could contain within it all the worlds as well, why should one doubt the Lord's power of pervasion of the minutest of things, both in and out?

Kara vicumpu, eri, vaḷi, nīr, nilam: ivaimicai
Varaṉ-navil, tiṟal, vali, aḷi, poṟai āyniṉṟa
Paraṉ aṭimēl kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
Niral-niṟai āyirattu ivai pattum vīṭē. (I–1–11)

Translation

The foregoing ten stanzas, out of the thousand, rich alike in sound and substance (matter and manner of expression), sung by Caṭakōpaṉ of Kurukūr, in adoration of the Glorious Feet of the Supreme Lord, the great Contriver and Controller of the five elements, the spatial ether, air, fire, water and earth, with their respective basic qualities of sound, force, heat, chillness and endurance, shall lead (the chanters on) to 'Mōkṣa' (final emancipation from the bondage of 'Saṃsāra', the terrific cycle of birth and death).

Notes

(i) This sets the pattern of the entire work, the last stanza of each decad indicating the benefits accruing to one who chants the songs in the decad and/or learns the meanings thereof. One might wonder how the Saint could refer to the size of the work, as comprising thousand stanzas right at the start. Well, there are two ways of looking at it, namely,

(*a*) as one whose knowledge was fully inspired by God, he knew that he would reel off a thousand stanzas; and

(*b*) the poet could not sustain himself except by singing a thousand songs in adoration of the Lord, and thus it was a matter already contemplated by him, a resolution, as it were, to sing as many songs.

(ii) Summing up, in this stanza, the decad as a whole, the Saint has made it abundantly clear that our salvation lies in seeking refuge at the Lord's Feet, the path of loving surrender to God being the central theme of the whole work, otherwise known as '*Dīrgha Śaraṇāgati*'. Actually, the first decad is the epitome of the entire hymnal, even as the first three stanzas of this decad sum up the topic of the whole decad while the first stanza is the quintessence of the first three stanzas and the opening line of the first stanza, the brilliant summary thereof.

First Centum Second Decad (I-2)
(Vitumin murravum)

Preamble

The transcendental glory of the Supreme Lord, His Supremacy as the material cause as well as the efficient cause and final cause of all life and being, the fact of His being the one and only Giver, either directly or through other minor deities, whose favours their respective votaries seek, His lustrous Feet being the sure and certain means of salvation for one and all, all these having been revealed to the Saint by the Lord Himself, the Saint revelled in this blissful knowledge, in the preceding Tiruvāymoli. Far from being selfish and self-centred, he wanted to share all this knowledge with his fellow beings, as a matter of mutual joy and enlightenment. But, alas! he found them all steeped in worldly life, just the very reverse of what he was. And yet, He would not lose heart. Banking on their inherent capacity to discriminate between good and bad things, he now exhorts them to give up the elusive and obnoxious pleasures of worldly life, disengage themselves from the erroneous notions of 'I' and 'Mine' and dedicate themselves to the apprehension of the limitless wealth and splendour of the Supreme Lord and reap the rich harvest of eternal bliss and beatitude. In this decad, the Āḻvār also teaches that true renunciation is of the mind, as distinguished from mere bodily displacements, such as fleeing away from the haunts of men and living a secluded life in a forest. No place is safe and impregnable to the invasion of temptations which could molest the mind, as seen from the examples of Ādi-Bharatā (Jaḍa-Bharatā) and Śoubhari. The Āḻvār exhorts, in the third stanza of this decad, as follows:

> "Pluck out the disease of 'I-ness' and 'My-ness',
> right from the roots and join the Lord".

Renunciation, therefore, lies in disengaging one's mind from the erroneous notions of 'I' and 'Mine' and surrendering oneself, *in toto*, to the will of God. Examples of such mental renunciation are found in King Janaka and Saint Kulacēkara. Did not the former say, unaffected by the illusory fire inducted by Sage Śuka, "Mithilāyāṁ pradagdhāyāṁ na me kiñcitpradahyate?"*

* If Mithilā is burnt, it is Mithila burnt; what is it to me"

Kulacēkara Āḻvār sang, in his 'Perumāḷ Tirumoḷi, IV decad:

Stanza 5:

"This realm, with all its wealth, I abjure,
Riding the elephant in rut, frightful to behold;
The blessing of being a shrub, I implore,
At lovely Tiruvēṅkaṭam, abode of my Liege, Lord".

Stanza 7:

"Little do I value being a King of Kings,
all that name and fame,
Holding sway under a single parasol,
white as the full moon;
Instead, 'tis my earnest will that I should,
as a jungle stream.
Course through Tirumalai, with its honey-
studded flower gardens".

**Viṭumiṉ muṟṟavum; viṭu ceytu, um uyir
Viṭu uṭaiyāṉiṭai viṭu ceymmiṉē. (I–2–1)**

Translation

Give up, *in toto*, [all that militates against holding a rapport with God] and giving up thus, surrender yourself unto (Him) the Custodian [the great Ordainer and Granter] of Heaven.

Notes

(i) Śrīman Nārāyaṇa is the Granter of Heaven, and yet the Āḻvār has not straightaway revealed that Holy Name, just to set the mind (of the listener) on to enquire, that is, stimulate spiritual investigation. Actually, the revelation comes in the tenth stanza.

(ii) What is emphasised in this stanza is the sacrifice of the worldly appetites to the surpassing love and beauty of God, the supreme preference to God, as against the adulteration of the senses towards earthly disposition.

If giving up has been mentioned first and surrender to the Lord next, one has to appreciate this sequence in the context of a child holding by the hand a live snake, and the elders around crying out: "*Drop it* down, *drop it* down, it is a snake!" Another example would be a passer-by, seeing a house on fire, exhorts the inmates of the house, "*Come out, come out*, your house is on fire". The emphasis thus rests on that which is to be eschewed, it being obnoxious, the very antithesis of the Lord to whom we owe undivided allegiance.

Minnin nilai ila man uyir âkkaikaḷ;
Ennum iṭattu, Irai unnumin nîrē. (I-2-2)

Translation

You will do well to pause for a while and discover for your selves that the bodies the souls get into [and look upon as the media for the enjoyment of sensual pleasures] last no more than the (fleeting) lightning.

Nîr numatu enru ivai vērmutal mâyttu, Irai
Cērmin; uyirkku atan nēr nirai Illē. (I-2-3)

Translation

Cutting out, root and branch, all sense of 'You' and 'Yours' join the Lord; there is nothing as good as that for the Souls [there can be no greater felicity than that].

Note

It would indeed be difficult to enumerate the thousand and odd things to be eschewed and discarded. And so, the poet just tackles the root causes of all the evils, which have to be eradicated *in toto*. Instead of wording as 'I' and 'Mine', the Āḻvār has cautiously put it in the second person, as 'You' and 'Yours', in this stanza, lest the very things he abhors and advises others to eradicate should corrupt him

even at the mere mention thereof, in the first person—the risk of getting his tongue blistered, avoided.

Illatum uḷḷatum allatu avaṉ uru;
Ellai il an nalam: pulku, paṟṟu aṟṟē. (I–2–4)

Translation

Renouncing all else, seek Him (*Īśvara*) of *limitless* bliss, very different from the [seemingly] non-existent [fleeting and ever-changing] material things and the ever-existing (non-changing) sentient beings [with their limiting adjuncts].

Note

An inexhaustible fountain of bliss that the Lord is, one has to attach oneself to such a fountain, only through a complete severance of attachment to the ephemeral and illusory worldly pleasures and distractions, with uncompromising rigidity; hence, this advice of the Āḻvār to the fellow-beings.

Aṟṟatu paṟṟu eṉil, uṟṟatu vīṭu uyir;
Ceṟṟu atu maṉ uṟil, aṟṟu iṟai paṟṟē. (I–2–5)

Translation

Freed from worldlv attachments, the Soul attains emancipation [from the erstwhile bondage]; however, shunning that [menacing state of self-enjoyment, known as *kaivalya mokṣa*], seek firmly the [bliss of eternal service to the Supreme] Lord, with exclusive devotion unto Him.

Note

Mere liberation from bondage resulting in a state of the lustrous soul getting lost in self-enjoyment (*kaivalya mokṣa*) is yet another hurdle, very menacing indeed, to be got over. being a serious impediment to the far superior and blissful experience of service unto the Lord on the yonder side of heaven, this '*kaivalya*' state also deserves to be shunned and discarded.

Paṟṟu ilaṉ-īcaṉum, muṟṟavum niṉṟaṉaṉ;
Paṟṟu ilaiyāy, avaṉ muṟṟil aṭaṅkē. (I–2–6)

Translation

Īcaṉ (the Supreme Lord), being solely attached to His devotees, He is All-in-One' (everything) unto them. And so, [ye worldlings]! hold on to Him and get absorbed in serving Him exclusively.

Note

Thinking that the worldlings (whom the Āḻvār addresses) might have their own misgivings about the easy accessibility of the Supreme Lord, Whom they are being asked to court and venerate, the doubt is being cleared in this stanza. Side by side with overlordship there is in Him the astounding quality of amazing simplicity, which predominates and makes it appear that this is His natural trait, and the other quality of Supremacy is super-imposed, rather serving as a foil against which the former shines all the more.

Aṭaṅku eḻil campattu aṭaṅkak kaṇṭu, Īcaṉ
Aṭaṅku eḻil aktu eṉṟu aṭaṅkuka uḷḷē. (I–2–7)

Translation

Realise that all this exceedingly enchanting cosmic wealth, you behold, is that of *Īcaṉ* [and that you are but a part of that]; [with this sense of belonging] it behoves you to blend yourself into it.

Notes

(i) No doubt, it was duly emphasised in the preceding stanzas that the Lord's native simplicity is far more pronounced than His overlordship, might and majesty. But the very thought of His majesty puts us, the insignificant tiny little beings nowhere, just like a bit of straw drifting on the bosom of the mighty ocean, being borne back to the shore by the curling waves. But

all this fear would vanish when we realise that we form part of His possessions and are thus rightfully entitled to approach Him, in love, without fear of such vast distance existing between Him and us, as between the ocean and the straw.

(ii) The miraculous change wrought by this sense of belonging has been happily illustrated by that great Preceptor, Nañciyar, as follows:

(*a*) A merchant went overseas for trading leaving his wife behind in an advanced state of pregnancy. A son was born to them and grew up nicely. Years rolled on and yet the merchant did not come back home. There was an exhibition in a neighbouring place at which the little boy took up a stall and sold his wares. Just then, the aforesaid merchant also returned from abroad and took up a neighbouring stall. There arose a quarrel, one of those days, over the encroachment of goods in their booths and when it grew violent a passer-by, who knew them both, pointed out that the elderly merchant was quarrelling with his own son. Hostilities ceased immediately and gave place to mutual remorse, with the happy *reunion* of father and son.

(*b*) It was a lovely garden and the Prince had a great mind to enter it. But then, he was afraid of trespassing into somebody's garden and, therefore, stood hesitatingly at the entrance. However, as soon as some one said, "This garden belongs to your father, the King", all fear vanished and he dashed inside, roamed about and enjoyed to his heart's content. So does our fear to approach the Almighty vanish as soon as we realise that we are His children, the natural objects of His boundless love.

Uḷḷam urai ceyal uḷḷa im mūnraiyum
Uḷḷik keṭuttu, Iṛai-uḷḷil oṭuṅkē. (I-2-8)

Translation

With true awareness that the triple faculties of mental apprehension, speech and bodily actions, already at your command, are meant to be solely dedicated to *Iṛai* (the Lord), place them at His exclusive service, duly divested of all their erstwhile misplaced attachments and inhibitions.

Oṭuṅka avaṉkaṇ, Oṭuṅkalum ellām
Viṭum; piṉṉum, ākkai viṭumpoḻutu eṇṇē. (I-2-9)

Translation

Once you (realise your true relationship with God, He, as the Proprietor and you, as His property and) dedicate yourself to Him (with this awakening), all your sins (which kept you away from Him, so long) will cease; (once the cause ceases, the effect, namely, the body which tethers you will automatically cease) await then, the day when the physical body falls off.

Note

As soon as the body drops off, salvation, sure and certain, waits at the door of one who entrusts oneself to the Lord's keeping, with the spiritual awakening, as above.

Eṇ perukku an nalattu oṇ poruḷ-īṛu ila
Vaṇ pukaḻ Nāraṇaṉ tiṇ kaḻal cērē. (I-2-10)

Translation

Seek ye, the mighty feet (the sure haven of all) of Nāraṇaṉ, who is, at once, the abode of countless souls of vast excellence and an inexhaustible fountain of bliss, the repository of innumerable auspicious attributes.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār concludes this, his first address to the fellow-beings, by teaching them how to pray, that is,

by giving out the substance of the eight-lettered 'Tirumantra', as above.

(ii) Kūrattāḻvāṉ, who was teaching Tiruvāymoḻi to his two sons, Bhaṭṭar and Śrīrāmappiḷḷai, stopped short when he came to this stanza, explanatory of the holy prayer (Tirumantra), which had to be taught by their constituted Guru, Śri Empār, residing in the same street, just a few houses off. Āḻvāṉ ordered the two youngsters to go to their Guru and learn the meaning of this stanza. Just as they were leaving, he called them back, saying:

"Stay! life is precarious and uncertain and one does not know who may live and who may die the next moment. You may, therefore, hear (the esoteric meaning of this verse) from myself." He then proceeded to explain to them the purport of this stanza which has a direct bearing on 'Tirumantra'. This only goes to emphasize that not a moment should be lost in learning the Science that will lead us to God, the more so, when human life is precarious and uncertain.

Cērttaṭat teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
Cīrt toṭai āyirattu ōrtta ip pattē. (I–2–11)

Translation

These ten stanzas, out of the thousand, sung in accurate metrical composition, by Caṭakōpaṉ of Tirunakari, with lovely ponds, convey his well-thought-out message (for the uplift and emancipation of mankind).

First Centum—Third Decad (I-3)
(Pattu uṭai Aṭiyavar)

Preamble

In the first decad of this centum, the Āḻvār spoke of the Super-eminent glory of the Lord and, in the very next decad, he exhorted the worldlings to turn their minds God-ward and get absorbed in Him, with whole-hearted devotion. But then, they felt that they

were no better than the man, lame of both hands, being required to mount an elephant. Now, in this decad, the Āḷvār puts them at ease by depicting the disarming simplicity of the Lord, like unto an elephant making itself so pliable as to enable even such a lame man to mount it easily. Speaking about the Supreme Lord's easy accessibility (saulabhya), the Āḷvār at once conjures up the vision of His being tied down to a mere pounder, when He, as Kṛṣṇa, the cowherd boy, got caught in the act of stealing butter—the very antithesis of His transcendent glory as the consort of Śrī Mahā Lakṣmī, residing on His winsome chest. Oh, what a contrast and what an amazing simplicity, which literally struck the poet dumb, nay, sent him into a deep trance, lasting six months! Here is an episode of episodes, melting down the hearts of the true devotees into running rivulets. As Śrī Vedānta Dēśika says, in his rapturous composition 'Yādavābhyudaya', mere contemplation of this episode leads to our release from bondage.

Pattu uṭai aṭiyavarkku eḷiyavaṉ, piṟarkaḷukku ariya
Vittakaṉ, Malarmakaḷ virumpum nam arumpeṟal aṭikaḷ
Mattu uṟu kaṭai veṇṇai kaḷaviṉil uraviṭai yāppuṇṭu
Ettiṟam, uralinōṭu iṇaintiruntu ēṅkiya eḷivē. (I–3–1)

Translation

Those who unto Him turn their minds, in utter devotion, He is easily accessible but is the Mystic, difficult of attainment by others. (Oh, what a wonder, as a mere infant, fondled by Yaśōdā and other damsels of Gōkul, he could vanquish the demoniac *Pūthanā*, *Śakaṭāśura* and a host of others!) Eagerly sought Malarmakaḷ (Śrī *Mahālakṣmī*), who emerged from the soft lotus flower and yet did not take to it kindly but took her abode on the broad and winsome chest of the Lord), what a marvel, our Lord, difficult to attain, was seen reduced to the abject position of a weeping child, fastened by the chest to a pounder (by *Yaśōdā*, as a punishment) for stealing butter off the churning rod-a paragon of simplicity galore!

Note

The Āḷvār is said to have gone into a trance for as many as six months, contemplating the amazing simplicity of the Supreme Lord, as brought out in this stanza.

Eḻivarum iyalviṉaṉ nilai varampu ila pala piṟappāy;
Oḻivarum muḻu nalam mutal ila, Kēṭu ila; vīṭu ām
Teḻitarum nilaimaiyatu oḻivu ilaṉ muḻuvatum; iṟaiyōṉ
Aḻivarum aruḷiṉōṭu akattaṉaṉ, puṟattaṉaṉ amaintē. (I–3–2)

Preamble

Tradition has it that Śrī Matura Kavi and several other savants, who had the great good fortune of listening to 'Tiruvāymoḻi' from the sacred lips of the Āḻvār, gathered round the insensate Āḻvār and eagerly awaited his return to his senses. It was after the lapse of a period of six months, that the Āḻvār recovered himself, took up the thread where he had left it and proceeded to expatiate on the Lord's aforesaid 'Saulabhya' (easy accessibility) by saying that He is simplicity itself (simplicity personified).

Translation

The Lord is the very personification of simplicity, which helps all His numerous auspicious qualities, without beginning or end, shine forth; having made innumerable descents without restriction of manner of birth and place of descent, it is always the Lord's prerogative to grant that cleansed and clarified state (known as '*Mokṣa*'). Shedding, with sweet spontaniety, His unlimited grace unto the devotees (and doing even odd jobs for them) He is beyond the reach of others (the inimical).

Amaivu uṭai aṟaneṟi muḻuvatum uyarvu aṟa uyarntu
Amaivu uṭai mutal keṭal oṭivu iṭai aṟa nilam atuām
Amaivu uṭai amararum, yāvaiyum yāvarum tāṉ ām,
Amaivu uṭai Nāraṇaṉ māyaiyai aṟipavar yārē? (I–3–3)

Translation

Who indeed can comprehend the wonderful secret of the descents (*Avatāras*) of (Lord) Nāraṇaṉ, the appropriate abode of all sentient beings including the 'Amaras' (the exalted Brahmā and other celestials) of outstanding eminence by virtue of their

moral attainments of a high degree and mental perfection, as well as the non-sentient things?

Note

None can indeed comprehend this divine secret, neither the ever-free, eternal angels (*Nitya Sūris*) in the yonder Heaven, totally immersed in the enjoyment of the Lord, in that transcendent setting nor the worldlings, engrossed in their pursuit after food and raiment nor even the *Ālvārs*, although blest by the Lord with perfect knowledge, as they just get entranced by the mere contemplation of the Lord's astounding simplicity and thaw down.

Yārum ōr nilaimaiyaṉ eṉa aṟivu-ariya em perumāṉ,
Yārum ōr nilaimaiyaṉ eṉa aṟivu-eḷiya em perumāṉ,
Pērum ōr āyiram piṟa pala uṭaiya em perumāṉ,
Pērum ōr uruvamum uḷatu illai, ilatu illai piṇakkē. (I–3–4)

Translation

Our Sire, bearing a thousand (innumerable) names and (the) forms (appropriate thereto) can be comprehended, as such, (by the devotees, however meagre, their intelect and poor, their parentage); (on the other hand) the ungodly who bear no love for Him cannot comprehend His names and forms (however exalted be their knowledge and parentage); (And so), there is a perennial debate (between these two sets of people) one group affirming that the Lord goes by several names and forms and the other group asserting that He has none of these.

Piṇakku aṟa aṟu vakaic camayamum neṟi uḷḷi uraitta
Kaṇakku aṟu nalattaṉaṉ; antam il āti am pakavaṉ;
Vaṇakku ūṭait tavaneṟi vaḷi niṉṟu, puṟaneṟi kaḷaikaṭṭu,
Uṇakkumiṉ, pacai aṟa! avanuṭai uṇarvukoṇṭu uṇarntē. (I–3–5)

Translation

The eternal Lord, the lovely Primate possessing the Six principal attributes of *knowledge, strength, sovereignty, valour, power* and *splendour*) has set at naught the *six heretical philosophical doctrines* (*Śāṅkhya, Yōga, Kaṇāta, Bouddha, Jaina* and *Pāśupada*) by

setting forth the cream of the Vedic teachings in His 'Song celestial' (*Gīta*). Imbibing the quintessence of those teachings, stick to the path of loving surrender to His Sweet grace (*Prapatti mārga*) to the exclusion of all the other paths of discipline, drying up, at the same time, the erstwhile springs of bodily pleasures *in toto* (not merely through non-indulgence in them but through a positive aversion thereto).

Note

As regards the concrete manner of worshipping the Supreme Lord, the Āḷvār, calls upon the fellow beings to tread the path of 'Bhakti' (God-love of melting tenderness of heart) indicated by the Lord Himself in His 'Song Celestial'.

Uṇarntu uṇarntu iḻintu akaṉṟu uyarntu uru viyanta iṉ ṉilaimai
Uṇarntu uṇarntu uṇarilum, iṟainilai uṇarvu aritu uyirkāḷ!
Uṇarntu uṇarntu uraittu uraittu Ari ayaṉ araṉ eṉṉum ivarai
Uṇarntu uṇarntu uraittu uraittu, iṟaiñcumiṉ maṉappaṭṭatu oṉṟē. (I–3–6)

Preamble

Worldlings to the Āḷvār:

"Oh, Saint, to us with limited knowledge, the Trinity, standing in a row, *Brahmā*, *Viṣṇu* and *Rudra*, appear to be all of the same stature. Pray, enlighten us, as to whether it is actually so or one of them is Superior to the other two or there is yet another Power superior to all the three, so that we may worship that Supreme Authority".

The Āḷvār's reply is as in this stanza, vide gist given below:

Translation

"For the *Jīvātmā* (individual Soul, with its innate intelligence and keen perception pervading far and wide), it is possible to know its own inherent nature and quality through a rigorous process of enquiry, intuition and contemplation. But a similar perception by the Individual Soul, of Iṟainilai (the Divine Nature, Īśvara Svarūpa) is hardly possible. (And yet) ye folks, better study intensely and dispassionately (the authoritative texts highlighting) the individual traits and course of conduct of *Ari* (Nārāyaṇa,

Ayan (Brahmā) and *Aran* (Rudra) and (in the process) fix your mind firmly on the one who impresses you as the Supreme Lord and worship Him (by reciting His names and the relative Mantras) with deep devotion. (Such a study will easily reveal that *Nārāyaṇa* is the Supreme, the Internal Controller of all, including *Brahmā* and *Rudra*, that He is wholly '*Sātvik*' while *Brahmā* and *Rudra* have a blend of '*Rājasik*' and '*tāmasik*' traits, He is the great Ordainer and the others are the ordained, so on and so forth).

Onṟu enap pala ena aṟivu-arum vaṭivinuḷ ninṟa
Nanṟu eḻil Nāraṇan Nānmukan aran ennum ivarai
Onṟa num manattu vaittu, uḷḷi, num iru pacai aṟuttu
Nanṟu ena nalam ceyvatu avaniṭai nammuṭai nāḷē. (I–3–7)

Translation

May you ponder in your mind, dispassionately, over the relative merits of the Gods. Nāraṇan beaming through His auspicious attributes, firm and fine, Nānmukan (the four-headed *Brahmā*) and *Aran* (*Rudra*), who look so much alike that it is difficult to comprehend whether they are one or many; may you also investigate (with the help of authoritative texts) and discern that there is but one God (and that is *Nārāyaṇa*, the Super-Soul residing in all, including *Brahmā* and *Rudra*); with this discovery you will do well to give up your allegiance to the other two (Brahmā and *Rudra*) as God and attach yourselves firmly to *Nārāyaṇa* (as the one and only God) during your life-time.

Nāḷum ninṟu aṭu nama paḻamai am koṭuvinai uṭanē
Māḷum, ōr kuṟaivu illai; manan-akam malam aṟak kaḻuvi,
Nāḷum nam tiru uṭai aṭikaḷ-tam nalam-kaḻal vaṇaṅki,
Māḷum ōr iṭattilum vaṇakkoṭu māḷvatu valamē. (I–3–8)

Translation

If we cleanse our minds of the dirt (of misconceived notion of parity among the '*Thiru-Murties*', *Brahmā*, *Viṣṇu* and *Śiva*) through that bleaching agent, called wisdom, and worship daily at the felicitous feet of our Lord, the gracious consort of *Tiru* (*Śrī Mahālakṣmī*), all our past sins which had been tormenting us so far will die out at once, and we will be free from wants of any

kind. (It is never too late to switch on to the Lord thus.) better repose on His lap, even while dying.

Notes

(i) To a question supposed to have been put to the Āḻvār by his interlocutors, whether their accumulated, age-long sins will not operate as a serious impediment to their worshipping the Lord, this stanza provides the answer. No doubt, the Śāstras proclaim.* that one cannot but taste the fruits of one's actions; in other words, the sins can be liquidated only by the compulsory process of undergoing the prescribed sufferings. That is all right, so far as the potentiality of the reactions of one's own past Karma goes. But that can be no bar to the operation of the Lord's mighty grace, full and flooding,, washing away all sins the moment one surrenders to Him, in the gracious presence of Mahālakṣmī, the Divine Mother. If past Karma is like the fire that burns out things, the Lord's grace is like the water that puts out fire.

(ii) Again, assuming that the worldlings further pleaded that time has run out already, and they have very little time left in the present span, the Āḻvār says that it is never too late; even if a decrepit old man dies, leaning forward on his stick, the Lord will be gracious enough to take it as an act of obeisance to Him. The Āḻvār stresses that it is better to bow unto Him, at least during the last moments of one's life, unlike Rāvaṇa whose creed was† not to bow unto any one till his death, and even while dying.

Valattaṉaṉ Tiripuram erittavaṉ, iṭamperat tuntit
Talattu eḻu ticaimukaṉ paṭaitta nal ulakamum tāṉum
Pulappaṭa, piṉṉum taṉ ulakattil akattaṉaṉ tāṉē;
Colap pukil, ivai piṉṉum vayiṟṟu uḷa; ivai avaṉ tuyakkē..
(I–3–9)

* 'Nābhuktaṃ Kṣayate Karma'.

† 'Na nameyam tu kasyacit'.

Translation

His (Lord Mahā Viṣṇu's) navel is the seat of *Ticai mukaṉ* (Brahmā), the creator of many a lovely world, while (*Rudra*) the (Ostensible) destroyer of the three (flying) citadels (and their demoniac chiefs) propitiates the Lord and gets allotted some space to the right, on His (the Lord's) broad, winsome chest (as a place of shelter, in any emergency). He (The Lord) also makes Himself visible to one and all, in the respective worlds (during His *Avatāras*).

In a manner of talking, these (great qualities of the Lord are innumerable, but) are kept in His stomach (undisclosed, far outnumbering those disclosed to us already); these are His enigmatic ways indeed.

Tuyakku aṟu matiyil nal ñāṉattuḷ amararait tuyakkum
Mayakku uṭai māyaikaḷ vāṉilum periyaṉa vallaṉ;
Puyal-karu niṟattaṉaṉ; peru nilaṅ kaṭanta nal aṭip pōtu
Ayarppilaṉ alaṟṟuvaṉ, taḻuvuvaṉ vaṇaṅkuvaṉ amarntē.

(I–3–10)

Translation

If aberrations are noticeable (now and then) in the mental attitudes of even those Amarars (*Celestials*) noted for clarity of knowledge and understanding) (like *Indra* and the 'Nitya Sūris', the ever free angels like *Garuḍa*), towards the supreme Lord, that is because the wonders (of His incarnation) exceed the bounds of the expansive sky and thus (easily) baffle them all. (Be that, as it may) I (on my part) shall unremittingly bow before the lovely feet of the cloud-hued Lord, which spanned the entire universe, embrace and extol them, with a mind wholly detached from all else.

Notes

(i) Speaking about the mental aberrations of even those exalted personages, here are two typical anecdotes: There was a time when the Devas were uprooted from their homes and their women folks were kidnapped by the Asuras. During His Avatāra, as Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Lord fought out the demons and restored the home and hearth to the Devas. While returning from that expedition, Śrī Kṛṣṇa took with Him a flower plant,

plucked out from Indra's garden, to be planted in His palace down below. The ungrateful Indra would, however, not tolerate it and, armed with his mace, he went in hot pursuit of the Lord to snatch the plant from Him.

(ii) And then, during the same Kṛṣṇāvatāra, Garuḍā came down to Earth in pursuit of a snake which, however, sought asylum in Lord Kṛṣṇa. Naturally, the Lord refused to release the snake when demanded by *Garuḍā*, and the latter made no secret of his resentment and uttered such harsh words as: "Is this the reward for my having carried you and your consorts on my shoulders all these years?"

Amararkaḷ toḷutu eḷa alai kaṭal kataintavaṉ-taṉṉai
Amar poḷil vaḷaṅ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ kuṟṟēvalkaḷ
Amar cuvai āyirattu, avaṟṟinuḷ ivai pattum vallār
Amararōṭu uyarvil-ceṉṟu aṟuvar tam piṟavi am ciṟaiyē.

(I–3–11)

Translation

Those that are conversant with these ten songs, out of the thousand sung sweetly, as a piece of Divine Service, by Caṭakōpaṉ of Kurukūr, rich and resourceful, in adoration of the one (Supreme Lord) that churned the milk-ocean with its surging waves, exciting the warm admiration and deep reverence of the (otherwise self-centred) *Amarars* (*Devas*) will get released from the firm and formidable grip of (the cycle of) births and join the holy band of the *Amarars* (the celestials) in the High Heavens.

First Centum—Fourth Decad (I-4)
(Am ciṟaiya maṭa nārāy)

Preamble

The Sublime and the Sensual have always co-existed in both the worlds-the mundane and the spiritual. There is, however, a fundamental difference in their inter-relationship, in the respective spheres. In the material world, the two are mutually exclusive,

being diametrically opposed to each other. In the spiritual world, that which, in the language of aesthetics, is termed as '*Śṛṅgār*', is nothing but the psychological imperative for man's consciousness moving towards Him (Super-Soul) of ravishing beauty (as *Bhāgavatā* bears out), just the very inversion of the skin-deep, carnal variety of lust, stamping out the human lover-beloved union. If the love-smitten Parāṅkuśa (Nammāḷvār, who was like unto a goad wearing round his spiritual antagonists through his scintillating hymns and making the Lord Himself pliable, enraptured by his sweet, love-laden hymns) turns out to be a female, expressing herself now as Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī (God-lover), then as the Mother, the intuitive gnostic friend of the love-lorn daughter trying to keep the latter under sobering restraint and sometimes as the soothing Mate, it is but the natural corollary to his boundless love for God and the deep yearning, beyond words, for the Divine presence and lasting union. Actually, the Lord is the only Male or Husband (*Loka bhartā*), the '*Puruṣottama*' the *Kṣetrajña*' and all the Individual souls are but marks of the feminine, the *Kṣetras*' (Location), the female centres of the creative activity of God. It is indeed quite some consolation that the lover-beloved theme is familiar ground for the worldlings and now, without adopting the austere Vedic approach, the Āḷvār would only want them to shift the base and turn the whole drama God-ward and be wholly absorbed in '*Daiva Rasa*' (spiritual love), the '*Brahmānubhava*'. Even as the female anatomy plays a key role in the earthly variety of love, in the spiritual world, '*Para Bhakti*', '*Para Jñāna*' and '*Parama Bhakti*', in the ascending scale of God-love, too deep for words, symbolise the breast of the God-lover, swelling up with God-love.

Songs attributed to the Mother and the Mate are all sung by the Āḷvār only. The Mate is the cementing force joining the lover and the Beloved; this Mate is only symbolic of the sense of fusion and belonging, the inalienable relationship of Master and Servant, between God and Man, inculcated by "*Praṇava*' (*Aum*) in '*Tirumantra*'. The Mother plays the role of '*Namaḥ*' in the said *Mantra* which puts an embargo on the Individual soul indulging in egoistic self-effort to attain God-head, instead of awaiting the descent of His grace. Thus, she prevents the love-intoxicated Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī from trespassing, that is, breaking all norms of correct feminine conduct, and keeps her under restraint. In this

decad, where the Āḻvār is seen transformed as 'Nāyakī' (female lover), some birds are sent bv her as emissaries to the Lord. This is the first of the four decads in the whole work, where messages are sent by the Āḻvār to the Lord, the other three being VI-1, VI-8 and IX-7. The winged birds typify the efficient preceptors possessed of the mighty wings, a happy blending of knowledge and conduct. This technique of the Āḻvār has been adopted by the subsequent poets as well. C. F. Kālidāsa's '*Meghadūta*' and Vedānta Deśika's '*Haṁsa Sandeśa*'. Parāśara Bhaṭṭar would exclaim: "The monkeys shot into fame with the advent of Śrī Rāma who employed Hanumān as His chosen emissary to Rāvaṇa's court; likewise the the Āḻvārs have made the winged birds famous by commissioning them to carry messages to their Beloved God".

The messages in the four decads, referred to above, were all despatched bv the Āḻvār to the Lord but to different destinations, namely, (1) *Vyūha* or the milk-ocean, the seat of the Lord's creative activity, (ii) the *Vibhava* or the Lord's incarnate forms, (iii) '*Paratva*' (transcendent) and '*Antaryāmi*' (Internal Controller of all) and (iv) *Arcā* (Iconic manifestaion), in the chronological order. The Āḻvār is now in the same plight as Śakuntalā, left behind in the hermitage, after her initial meeting and union with King Duṣyanta and hence the necessity for this message invoking the Lord's special trait of forgiveness, by way of overlooking the drawbacks noticed by the Lord in the Āḻvār during their erstwhile union.

And to end this preamble precisely as it was begun, here is an interesting anecdote. When the great Preceptor, Nañcīyar was discoursing on this Tiruvâymoḻi, one of his listeners abruptly left the place, murmuring that the discourse had assumed the complexion of a sensualist's love-conversation. In the first three decads, the saint had expounded Divinity as the Exalted, the worship-worthy and the Easily-accessible. The listener in question appreciated these and observed: "Here is a grand theme, worthy of acceptance by the world-weary, and so long as it treats of the Almighty in His sublime character I am bound to listen to it, as a sensible man ought to". But, as soon as the Saint changed the Divine discourse into the form of love to God, love treated by analogies taken from the experience of mankind in this world, specially in its relation as Lover and the Beloved, Mistress and Spouse and so on, the disciple turned away from it, thinking that this kind of treatment

was a shock to good taste, outrage to his wisdom and a violence to his commonsense. Nāñciyar couldn't but deplore the failure of this unfortunate listener to see, in it, the explanation of the mysterious Divine Love (Bhakti), contained in the Commandment of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka upaniṣad* (*Maitreyi Brāhmaṇa*, 44) to the effect that the Lord is to be lovingly, intensely meditated upon

First Centum—Fourth Decad (I-4)

Am ciṟaiya maṭa nārāy! aḷiyattāy! nīyum niṉ
Am ciṟaiya cēvalumāy āā eṉṟu eṉakku aruḷi,
Vem ciṟaip puḷ uyarttārkku eṉ viṭū-tūtāyc ceṉṟakkāl,
Vaṉ ciṟaiyil avaṉ vaikkil, vaippuṇṭāl eṉ ceyumō? (I–4–1)

Translation

Ye young, sympathetic Stork, with pretty plumes, taking pity on poor me, go with your male partner and deliver my message to the Lord on whose banner Is (Garuḍa) that bird with formidable plumes; If perchance He puts you in prison tough, what does it matter if you were to suffer on my behalf?

Notes

(i) The white wading birds, stork, crane and heron employed by the Āḻvār as emissaries to God, signify the preceptors, absolutely pure, in and out, standing four-square against the temptations of worldly life, just like these birds with tremendous staying powers, taking up firm positions in the watersheds, coolly resisting the onslaught of the waves.*

(ii) It may be noted that the help of the male stork is solicited through the female, following the imperative need for seeking the Lord through the good offices of the Divine Mother, the grand Intercessor between God and man.

(iii) Putting the birds in prison should not be taken literally and, in fact, it is most unlikely that the Lord would ever

* Aphorism 154, Ācārya hṛdayam.

do so. It would indeed be worse than putting them in the toughest prison if He just remained cold and indifferent and would not even look at them, an experience comparable with that of the Princes not getting fed when hunger pinches them

Eṉ ceyya tāmaraikkaṇ-perumāṉārkku eṉ tūtāy
Eṉ ceyyum uraittakkāl? iṉak kuyilkāḷ nīr alirē?
Muṉ ceyta muḻuviṉaiyāl tiruvaṭikkīḻk kuṟṟēval
Muṉ ceyya muyalātēṉ akalvatuvō? vitiyiṉamē. (I–4–2)

Preamble

The love-intoxicated Āḻvār beckoned the stork pair, in the preceding stanza, to carry a message to the Lord but the contents of the message are now revealed by him to a band of Kōels. This kind of confusion only reveals the intensity of the Āḻvār's God-love, the ecstatic imbalance of mind.

Translation

Oh, ye happy band of Kōels, what will unto ye happen If you conveyed my message to my lotus-eyed Lord? Well, aren't you the familiar lot? should it be decreed That I, who, from His service, did all these days abstain because of my past sins, be still kept away from His feet?

Notes

(i) There are many points of comparison between the Kōels and the Ācāryas (preceptors).*

(ii) Here is an interesting anecdote to drive home the point that our accumulated sins cannot be washed off by our own efforts and that it is only the Lord's spontaneous grace that can cut the gordian knot and absolve us. Kōḷari Āḻvāṉ and Teṟkāḻvāṉ, two residents of the famous pilgrim centre, Tirukkōṭṭiyūr, in the South, met on an auspicious day, at a bathing ghat. The former demanded of the latter to wash off his sins by taking a dip in the

* See aphorism 153 of Ācārya Hṛdayam, wherein other birds such as parrots, peacocks have also been brought in.

sacred tank. Sharp came the rejoinder from the latter: "Think not, friend, that my sins will be washed merely by dipping in these waters once or twice. Unless the grace of Lord Saumya Nārāyaṇa (the presiding Deity of the place) descends on me and the discus in His hand destroys all my sins, all my personal exertions will be of no avail." Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, who happened to overhear the conversation was thence forward well impressed with Teṟkāḻvāṉ about whom he had no high opinion before, on a mere superficial estimate.

Vitiyiṉāl peṭai maṇakkum meṉ-naṭaiya aṉṉaṅkāḷ!
Matiyiṉāl Kuṟaḷ māṇāy ulaku iranta kaḷvarkku,
Matiyilēṉ val-viṉaiyē māḷātō? eṉṟu erutti
Mati ellām uḷ kalaṅki, mayaṅkumāl eṉṉīrē. (I-4-3)

Translation

You lucky pair of swans, with gentle gait, go and tell Him who, as the midget (Vāmana), covertly got a donation of the worlds, that here lies one, whose sins are inexhaustible, in a terrible state of mental imbalance.

Notes

(i) *Lucky pair of swans or lucky Āḻvār?*

It is not so much the felicity of the swans that they remain duly mated, enjoying conjugal bliss, as the luck of the Āḻvār himself. But for their lucky state of existence they would not have been available now for employment by the Āḻvār. Although Śrī Rāma was bemoaning his separation from Sītā, he felt greatly relieved after he got Sugrīva restored to his wife and Kingdom. Even so, the Āḻvār deems himself lucky to see the swans in a happy state.

(ii) The swans are briefed by the Āḻvār to tell the Lord that the sins of the Āḻvār are inexhaustible and that His redemptive grace alone can deliver the goods, in case the Lord insisted that the Āḻvār should first liquidate his sins and then only join Him.

(iii) *Third line*: '*here lies one*': It is hardly necessary to disclose the name of this one by way of identification for the Lord jolly well knew His victim as none other than poor Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, reduced to this critical state by their erstwhile union—

E<u>n</u> nīrmai kaṇṭu iraṅki, itu takātu e<u>n</u><u>n</u>āta
E<u>n</u> nīla mukil vaṇṇa<u>r</u>ku e<u>n</u> colli yā<u>n</u> collukē<u>n</u>ō?
Na<u>n</u>-nīrmai i<u>n</u>i avarkaṇ taṅkātu e<u>n</u><u>r</u>u oru vāyccol
Na<u>n</u>-nīla maka<u>n</u><u>r</u>ilkāḷ! nalkutirō? nalkīrō? (I–4–4)

Preamble

Seeing that Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī was commissioning several birds, a few blue-tinted A<u>n</u><u>r</u>il (Cakravāka) birds approached her, as if to enquire whether they could also be of service to her. But the dejected lover that she was, she was struck down by the futility of sending a message to the Lord who remained aloof despite an intimate knowledge of her plight, her inordinate love for Him, during their erstwhile union and failed to see the injustice of the present separation. And yet, she asked the blue birds to apprise her blue-hued Lord of her precarious condition, with little or no chance of survival.

Translation

Ye A<u>n</u><u>r</u>il birds of sapphire hue!
Tell Him I am about to die, will you?
What have I to tell my cloud-hued Lord,
Who relents not, having seen how I fared
(During our union), and sees not, on his part
'Tis most unjust, from me to depart?

Note

When Sri Parāśara Bhaṭṭar was discoursing on this song, a Tamil Scholar contended that the expression, "having seen my plight", in the first line (original text) should be 'having heard of my plight'. His doubt was how, when they had already been locked in the joy of union, could God, one of the pair, see the signs of pain of the other, after separation. To this, Bhaṭṭar replied: "Don't you

know what the Tamil Savant Tiruvaḷḷuvar has said? The lady-love lay in tight embrace with her lover but, now and then, they got a little unlocked while turning on their sides; this slight distance between them was enough to make her lose the colour on her skin, a decolouration resulting from the gloom of separation! Again, in the poems of '*Kuṟuntokai*' it has been said, whereever, wherever the lover touched, there, there, a flush of colour arose; wherever, wherever the touch had ceased, there, there, the colour sank. The scholar could at once realise that the message in question only reminds the Lord of what He had Himself noticed during His erstwhile union with Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī.

Nalkit tāṉ kāttu aḷikkum poḷil ēḻum; viṉaiyēṟkē
Nalkat tāṉ ākātō? Nāraṇaṉaik kaṇṭakkāl,
Malku nīrp puṉal-paṭappai irai tēr vaṇ ciṟu kurukē!
Malku nīrk kaṇṇēṟku ōr vācakam koṇṭu aruḷāyē. (I–4–5)

Preamble

Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī begs of a heron to convey the following message to her beloved Lord:

" It matters not if I rot here, away from Him. But He is Nārāyaṇa who, by the very implication of that name, resides in all beings and sustains them all, unsought and unsolicited, with no exception whatsoever. Even the solitary exclusion of myself from the scope of His benevolent protection will jeopardise His position of eminence, His very name. It behoves Him, therefore, to avert this calamity. "

Translation

Ye little lovely heron, seeking food in water-logged flower gardens,
When you behold Nāraṇaṉ, the sole sustainer of the worlds seven,
Will you deign to tell Him that here is one,

With tearful eyes, a sinner He can't throw down,
And bring back any reply He chooses to send on?

Notes

(i) *Line* 4: *With tearful eyes*: Tears welling up and filling the eyes of the Āḻvār would, as it were, serve as an identification mark for him, whether in a state of separation from or union with the Lord. In the former case it would be tears of grief and in the latter, tears of Joy.

(ii) When a doubt was expressed as to how the Saints, soaked in God-love, could address the senseless birds to carry messages to God, the illustrious Nampiḷḷai replied: In affairs of love to God, even storks and stones can serve as messengers, albeit the party at the other end is as exalted as Sītā, the crown jewel of Janaka's clan. On one occasion, Parāśara Bhaṭṭar was informed of the death of a low-caste devotee in such ordinary language as "he has breathed his last." Bhaṭṭar at once admonished his informant and said that the news should have been worded as: "He bade farewell here to go and join the ranks of the celestials in Heaven." He added that caste is of no account, when good men go to God and so also, when messengers are for God, they may be even stones and plants, not to talk of the animate birds.

(iii) *Line* 4: '*a sinner He cannot throw down*': "Having roused my appetite for Him, where there was none before, could He now give me up on account of my past sins? Could He who, as Nārāyaṇa, extends protection to one and all (universal), give up His chosen ones like me? Have I sinned to the extent of making even the oceanic water go dry as it is being pumped out?

Aruḷāta nīr aruḷi, avar āvi tuvarāmuṉ,
Aruḷ-āḻip puṭkaṭavīr avar vīṭi orunāḷ eṉṟu
Aruḷ-aḻi ammāṉaik kaṇṭakkāl, itu colli-
Aruḷ; Āḻi vari vaṇṭēl yāmum eṉ piḻaittōmē? (I-4-6)

Translation

You bee, with lovely hoops! if you meet my gracious Lord,
Pray tell Him, although He didn't relent thus far, He should
His grace on me shed, ere life from me departs,
And just pass some day through this street,
Mounting the gracious bird (Garuḍa); I shall then steal
A glance at Him. Oh! what is my fault
(That He against me His heart should steel)?

Note

In the preceding stanza, the Lord was advised against imperilling His position as Nārāyaṇa. On second thoughts, the Āḷvār now apprehends the frightful possibility of the Lord staying away from him, choosing the lesser of the two evils, the greater one being contamination by the Āḷvār. Here then is a compromise formula—the Lord, being an ocean of grace, will certainly shed His grace on the Āḷvār also, the sooner the better, that is, ere his life ebbs out; even the simple gesture of His passing through the street where the Āḷvār lives, not often, but just one day, will do. The gracious Garuḍa could certainly oblige the Āḷvār and bring the Lord over here on his shoulders. This was precisely the message conveyed by Sītā to Śrī Rāma through Hanumān. Here is also a painful contrast, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, separated from her beloved Lord, undergoing all the pangs of mental torture experienced by Śrī Rāma after the abduction of Śītā. The Āḷvār now ruminates and keeps guessing whether his languishing like this without enduring his lot patiently, would be adjudged as his fault. But then, he would also recollect that Śrī Rāma fared no better when apart from Sīta.

Eṉpu iḷai kōppatu pōlap paṉi vāṭai īrkiṉṟatu;
Eṉ piḷaiyē niṉaintaruḷi aruḷāta Tirumālārkku
Eṉ piḷaittāḷ tiruvaṭiyiṉ takaviṉukku eṉṟu oru vāyccol
Eṉ piḷaikkum? iḷaṅ kiḷiyē! yāṉ vaḷartta nī alaiyē. (I–4–7)

Translation

Here am I, tormented by the spine-chilling blast,
Ye young parrot, ain't you the one I reared,

What'll go wrong with you, if you went and enquired
Of 'Tirumāl', who looks solely on my faults
And sheds not His grace on me, what is precisely
My fault that admits not His clemency?

Note

This is the key stanza of this decad. The messages sent in this decad, keep in the forefront the Lord's noble trait of forgiveness (aparâdha sahatvaṁ). If the Lord is not prepared to concede even the simple request (as in the preceding stanza) of some day passing through the street where the Āḻvār lives, alienated by his shortcomings, the question is now asked, what has happened to His accredited trait of forgiveness, His boundless grace, avidly gorging all our sins. In the inimitable language of 'Iṭu' the Āḻvâr queries, "My Lord, have I obstructed the influx of your sweet grace, through over-indulgence in genuflections and circumambulations?"

Nī alaiyē? ciṟu pūvây! neṭumālârkku eṉ tūtây
Nōy eṉatu nuval eṉṉa. nuvalātē iruntoḷintây;
Cāyaloṭu maṇi mâmai taḷarntēṉ nāṉ; iṉi uṉatu
Vây-alakil iṉ-aṭicil vaippārai nāṭâvē. (I–4–8)

Translation

Young Pūvây, you didn't respond to my appeal
That you should unto Neṭumāl (my Lord) go and reveal
My pangs of separation, but quietly lingered on;
And now that I am sinking, my hue and grace gone,
You shall depart hence and seek those who, thy bill,
With tiny bits of delicious food can fill.

Note

(i) 'Pūvai' is a nice-looking, tiny bird.

(ii) Here is a thrilling anecdote. With declining health, Periya Tirumalai Nampi, one of the five Preceptors of Śrī Râmânuja, became too feeble to offer the diurnal wor-

ship to the household Deity-Lord Kṛṣṇa, given the pet name of '*The little one dancing for butter*'. And so, one day, drawing aside the drapery that hung before the Deity, he prostrated and recited the last two lines of this particular song (as in the original text), the gist of which has been given above, in the last three lines.

Nāṭāta malar nāṭi, nāḷtōṟum Nāraṇaṉ-taṉ
Vāṭāta malar-aṭikkīḻ vaikkavē vakukkiṉṟu;
Vīṭāṭi viṟṟiruttal viṉaiaṟṟatu eṉ ceyvatō?
Ūṭāṭu paṉi vāṭāy! uraittu īrāy eṉatu uṭalē. (I-4-9)

Translation

You biting blast, ever on the move, enquire of Nāraṇaṉ, my Lord,
Why (my limbs) for diurnal service at His floral feet ordained,
Are this felicity denied and in melancholy steeped;
If from Him, no favourable reply you obtain,
Better (come and) split my body into twain.

Notes

(i) The chill blast, inflicting severe pain on Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, like unto the king's executioners torturing the subjects found guilty of high treason, is addressed by her as follows:

"You see me deep down in dejection, due to long separation from my Lord and it is my grievous misfortune that, in such a state, I abstain from the stipulated daily service, such as gathering choice flowers and placing them reverently at the ever-fresh lotus feet of the Lord, etc. You had better go and ask Him how this has come to pass. If, however, He feels disinclined to take service from me, I beg of you, taking your feet in my hands, to finish me off altogether and thus put an end to this insipid and futile existence".

(ii) The wind is the chief sustainer of life and appropriately symbolises the Ācārya (Preceptor).

Uṭal āḻip piṟappu vīṭu uyir mutalā muṟṟumāyk
Kaṭal āḻi-nīr tōṟṟi, ataṉuḷḷē kaṇvaḷarum
Aṭal-āḻi ammāṉaik kaṇṭakkāl, itu colli,
Viṭal, āḻi maṭa neñcē! viṉaiyōm oṉṟām aḷavē. (I–4–10)

Translation

Oh, my fickle mind, 'tis our birthright to serve the Lord,
Go to Him, holding the bright discus and reclining in the deep sea,
The Architect of all created worlds, and let Him see
Our sad plight; leave Him not till unto Him we get restored.

Note

When the details of service unto the Lord were spelt out by the Āḻvār in the preceding stanza, his mind, bent upon such service, was about to slip out of the body. It is held by some that the Āḻvār requested his mind not to get parted till stability with the Lord was attained. Being, however, a decad where the Āḻvār sends errands, it would be more appropriate to say that he sent his mind also on such an errand, briefing it not to leave the Lord till He eventually deigns to get restored to the Āḻvār.

Aḷavu iyaṉṟa ēḻ ulakattavar perumāṉ kaṇṇaṉai
Vaḷa vayal cūḻ vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ vāyntu uraitta
Aḷavu iyaṉṟa antāti āyirattuḷ ip pattiṉ
Vaḷa uraiyāl peṟalākum vāṉ ōṅku peru vaḷamē. (I–4–11)

Translation

Those that just recite these sweet songs ten
Out of the metrically perfect thousand, lovingly composed by Caṭakōpaṉ,
Chief of rich and fertile Kurukūr, in adoration
Of Kaṇṇaṉ, Lord of the denizens of the worlds seven,
Will attain the Supreme bliss of service in Heaven.

Notes

(i) In the preceding decad, expatiating on the Supreme Lord's easy accessibility, the Saint wanted to abide

in the proximate Kṛṣṇa avatāra but failure to achieve it led him to send errands to the Lord in this decad. Having seen the intensity of the love of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī and her yearning for Divine presence, too deep for words, as revealed in the preceding ten stanzas, the Lord could not stay back any longer, except at the risk of the Āḻvār being lost to this world altogether. The fact that the Lord has been restored to the Saint can be inferred from the very tenor of this stanza, where the Lord is being extolled as the Chief of all the worlds, thus presenting His overlordship and easy-accessibility, side by side.

(ii) Even the mere recital of the text of these stanzas, without so much as delving into their spirit and meaning, will, it is claimed, shoot one up, from the bottom-most depths of worldly existence to the highest state of Service unto the Lord in the High Heavens.

First Centum—Fifth Decad (I-5)
(Vaḷa-ēḻ ulakiṉ mutalāya)

Preamble

In each of the preceding four decads, the Āḻvār has highlighted a particular trait of the Lord. These are exaltation (transcendent glory), Worship-worthiness, easy-accessibility (saulabhya) and forgiveness, respectively. In this decad, the Saint brings into focus the Lord's condescension (sauśīlya), mixing freely with the lowliest, the crowning trait of the Lord, heading the list of sixteen traits mentioned by Śrī Vālmīki, in his poser at the very beginning of Rāmāyaṇa*. Śrī Rāma's rapport with Guhā, the hunter, and intimate association with the monkeys, Vibhīṣaṇa etc., illustrate this.

When, in response to the heart-rending, rather, heart-warming appeal of the Āḻvār, in the preceding decad, the Lord presented

* "Konvasmin sāmpratam loke, guṇavān, Kaśca vīryavān etc., etc.

Himself before the Āḷvār, in all His grandeur, betokening the enormity of His grace unto the Āḷvār, one should have expected the latter to just jump in and get himself locked up in the Lord's sweet embrace. But what did he do? The Āḷvār beheld, with bewildering amazement, the Lord, in His full splendour, in dire contrast to his own littleness, a very picture of oppressive contrast indeed, oppressive because he dared not defile and desecrate the Great One, taking undue advantage of His condescending love. And so, he attempted to run away from the Lord, a very strange behaviour for which the only possible explanation is that he just got drifted into such a mental complex at the mere thought of the Lord's transcendent glory. Such alternating extremes of behaviour are, however, noticeable in Saint Yāmuṉa, Kūrattāḷvāṉ and his illustrious son, Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar also. As a matter of fact, the draw-backs in us serve as the foil against which the Lord's 'Sauśīlya' (condescension) shines all the more.

Vaḷa ēḻ ulakiṉ mutalāya vāṉōr-iṟaiyai aruviṉaiyēṉ
kaḷavēḻ veṇṇey toṭu uṇṭa kaḷvā! eṉpaṉ; piṉṉaiyum
taḷavu ēḻ muṟuval-piṉṉaikkuāy val āṉ-āyar talaivaṉāy
Iḷa-ēṟu ēḻum taḻuviya entāy! eṉpaṉ niṉaintu naintē. (I–5–1)

Translation

How dare I, a deep-rooted sinner, meditate
On the Lord of all the worlds and Heaven and narrate
The mystery of His stealing butter and taming bulls,
As a cow-herd boy for the hand of Piṉṉai. the damsel
Of bewitching smile, and (pretend to) thaw down in ecstasy?

Note

The Āḷvār, in his present mood of self-denouncing humility, feels that he has defiled and desecrated the Supreme Lord by word, when he recounted His mysterious deeds and addressed Him as 'My Sire', by thought, when he meditated on Him, and by deed, when he melted down, in ecstasy, as it were, a mockery of devotion.

ninaintu naintu uḷ karaintu urukki, imaiyōr palarum munivarum
puṉainta kaṇṇi nīr cāntam pukaiyōṭu ēntu vaṇaṅkinal,
niṉainta ellāp poruḷkaṭkum vittuāy, mutalil citaiyāmē
maṉam cey ñāṉattu uṉ perumai mācūṇātō? māyōṉē. (I–5–2)

Translation

Oh, wonderful Lord, You are the supreme architect
Of all things conceivable and yet immutable you are!
Will it not from your glory great detract
If (Brahmā and other) Devas, Sages and others
(Your creatures all) meditate on you, thaw down and unto
You offer
Flowers, sandal paste, sacramental water and incense burn?

Notes

(i) In this stanza, the Āḷvār realises that he is unfit even to say that he has defiled the Lord. What is his title, either way, to dabble in God-head? It is something like a person, who, by reason of his birth, is precluded from learning the Vedas, saying that he has not learnt the Vedas, as if he has failed to learn a thing he is entitled to learn. This feeling of the Āḷvār could be inferred from his present observation that even the worship offered through their triple faculties of word, deed and thought, by the exalted Devas, like Brahmā, and Sages of the eminence of Sanaka, pales into insignificance and would only detract from His great glory, as the Supreme Architect of all. It is little better than a team of ants worshipping the majestic lion.

(ii) Once the seed is sown, what comes up is the tree; cotton disappears, when turned into thread which again disappears, when turned into a fabric. But it redounds to the great glory of the Lord, one of His many marvels, that He remains unchanged despite His being the material cause of the entire universe. Well, What glory is there in His being worshipped by His own creatures? It would make sense only if the Lord is

worshipped by persons of comparable stature but alas! there is none falling in this category.

mā yōṉikaḷāy naṭai kaṟṟa vāṉōr palarum muṉivarum
nī yōṉikaḷaip paṭai eṉṟu, niṟai nāṉmukaṉaip paṭaittavaṉ;
cēyōṉ ellā aṟivukkum; ticaikaḷ ellām tiruvaṭiyāl
tāyōṉ; ellā ev uyirkkum tāyoṉ; tāṉ ōr uruvaṉē. (I–5–3)

Translation

He who created the profound Nāṉmukaṉ (Brahmā) and bade him create
The exalted Vāṉōr (Devas), Sages and several others,
He who is beyond comprehension, whose lovely feet
Spanned the worlds, who unto all is like a Mother,
Is our unique Lord (as condescending as He is great).

Note

Finding the Āḻvār in a state of unparalleled humility, shrinking back, the Lord draws his attention to the other mellowing aspect, namely, His loving condescension. Did He not span the entire universe with utter impartiality and set His tender feet over hill and dale, and one and all, without distinction of high and low? Contemplating this episode, the Āḻvār got into a mid-condition in which he would neither approach the Lord nor get away from Him but keep talking of the unique combination in the Lord, of exaltation and condescension, which cannot be found in any one else.

tāṉ ōr uruvē taṉi vittuāy, taṉṉiṉ mūvar mutalāya
vāṉōr palarum muṉivarum maṟṟum maṟṟum muṟṟum āy,
tāṉ ōr perunīr taṉṉuḷḷē tōṟṟi, ataṉuḷ kaṇvaḷarum
vāṉōr perumāṉ; mā māyaṉ vaikuntaṉ em perumāṉē. (I–5–4)

Preamble

Finding the Āḻvār, a little less scared of the Lord's exaltation than a little while ago, some persons asked him what exactly he was intending to do, whether to get near the Lord or get away from Him. This stanza provides the answer to this question, real or supposed. The Āḻvār says:

" Even if I wish to keep aloof, my Lord would not give me up. Look at His condescending love of amazing dimensions. The great Creator of all the worlds and all classes of sentient and non-sentient beings, the Supreme Master of all, including the celestials in the High Heaven, above wants of any kind, reclining on the bosom of the vast expanse of water in Yoga nidrā, is now right here to claim me as His inalienable property '.

Translation

The Supreme Lord beside whom there was none,
Created the first three (Brahmā, Śiva and Indra), this, that and the other,
(Devas, Sages, men, birds, beasts and all) with no *external aid* (i) whatever
And reposed (in Yoga nidra) on the vast expanse of water,
He had raised; the wondrous Lord, Chief of celestials, Vaikuntaṉ, is also my *Master* (ii).

Notes

(i) The Lord is at once the *Material* (Upādāna) cause, *Operative* (nimitta) cause and *Instrumental or efficient* (Sahakāri) cause of Creation.

(ii) This is the key word for this stanza. The Master has come to reclaim His property (the Āḻvār) and He shall not be a party to its slipping through the fingers.

māṉ ēy nōkki maṭavāḷai mārpil koṇṭāy; mātavā!
kūṉē citaiya uṇṭai vil niṟattil teṟittāy; kovintā!
vāṉ ār cōti maṇivaṇṇā! matucūtā! nī aruḷāy uṉ
tēṉē malarun tiruppātam cērumāṟu viṉaiyēṉē (I–5–5)

Preamble

There are two ways of looking at the background of this stanza. The first is: With the recession of his self-abnegating humility, the Āḻvār prays for the felicity of constant attendance on the Lord, in close proximity. The other is: Intent upon stabilising the Āḻvār's longing for Him so that there is no slipping back again, the Lord intensifies the longing by keeping away from him for a while.

Unable to stand this separation, the Āḷvār cries out his heart, invoking the Lord's grace for reunion.

Translation

On your winsome chest, you hold doe-eyed Mother, Oh, Mātavā,
With perfect ease, you remove *the hunch* (i) off a damsel, oh, Kōvintā,
Your sapphire hue radiates the entire heaven, oh, *Matucūtā* (ii)
Your *grace* (iii), this sinner invokes to reach your lotus feet, shedding honey.

Notes

(i) The underlying episode could be either the one stated here, pertaining to Kṛṣṇāvatāra or yet another pertaining to Rāmāvatāra. The former is: As Kṛṣṇa was wending His way through the main road of Mathura along with Balarāma, Tṛvakrā, the hump-backed young woman with handsome features, was passing along with a vessel containing sweet-smelling sandal paste, specially prepared by her for King Kamsa. Kṛṣṇa accosted her and demanded of her some of that excellent preparation. Entranced by Their bewitching looks, she gave the Divine Brothers the thick aromatic paste, with all her heart. Greatly pleased with the service, Śrī Kṛṣṇa deftly transformed her at once into a straight-backed damsel, erect and elegant.

The episode in Rāmāyaṇa relates to Śrī Rāma having hit, out of a boyish prank, the hump on the back of the hunch-backed Mantarā, the maid-servant of Queen Kaikeyī, with unerring aim and caused her great pain. She then bore her suffering silently but wreaked her vengeance on Rāma, at the crucial moment, by poisoning the mind of Kaikeyī. But then, this mischief is attributed to Govinda, that is, Kṛṣṇa in this stanza, which is apparently a misfit. There is, however, the following explanation for this in Nampiḷḷai's 'Īṭu': 'Govinda' could also

mean. 'Protector of the Earth', in which case, the address could fit in with Rāma, as well. Alternately, Kṛṣṇa, with so many mischievous pranks up His sleeves, could easily be made the butt for each and every frolic, whether perpetrated by Him or not, even as the saying goes, "All sins shall be heaped on Amaṇa's head". And now, who is this poor Amaṇa, earning such vicarious notriety? Amaṇa or Śamaṇa is an ascetic of the jain religious order. A complaint went to the King who was a simpleton. The complaint arose from the mud wall of a Brahmin's house giving way and killing a thief who broke into it. When the thief's friends demanded of the Brahmin compensation, both parties appealed to the King for justice. The King asked the Brahmin to pay compensation, as the thief died because of the wet wall. The Brahmin, however, put the blame on the mason who built the Wall. The mason appeared in court and pleaded that it was all the mistake of the waterman who had poured too much water. The waterman blamed the potter who had made the pot big. The potter excused himself by putting the blame on a dancing girl, who passed along and diverted his attention while making the pot. The dancing girl, in turn, blamed the washerman, who failed to bring her clothes in time, and necessitated her visit to his house. The dhoby too trotted out an excuse that the stone on which he washed the clothes was occupied by a Śamaṇa who wouldn't budge from it for quite a long time, and so the return of clothes to the customers was got delayed. And now, the Śamaṇa kept quiet, on account of his vow of silence and the stupid King construed this silence as admission of guilt and ordered the Śamaṇa to be hanged. Our pity rather goes to Kṛṣṇa at whose door every fault is laid, in this fashion.

(ii) 'Matucūta', the sanskrit word being 'Madhusūda' means: Slayer of the demon called Madhu.

(iii) The grace which could condone the sin of the Āḻvār, attempting to run away from the Lord like unto the ruthless rejection of the food served at the dining table.

viṉaiyēṉ viṉai tīr maruntu āṉāy! viṇṇōr talaivā! kēcavā!
maṉai cēr āyar-kula mutalē! mā māyaṉē! mātavā!
ciṉai ēy taḷaiya marāmaraṅkaḷ ēḻum eytāy! cirītarā!
iṉaiyāy! iṉaiya peyariṉāy! eṉṟu naivaṉ aṭiyēṉē. (I–5–6)

Translation

Oh, Kēcava, reigning supreme in the high Heavens
Thou art the antidote for this sinner's (dire) sins.
Oh, Mātavā, of mysterious deeds! Chief of cowherds,
The seven trees with branches many! oh, Cirītarā,
Thine arrow pierced.
Dissolve do I, recounting such other deeds of yours
And the relative names You are pleased to bear.

Note

This is a song sung in the same mood as the immediately preceding song.

aṭiyēṉ ciṟiya ñāṉattaṉ; aṟital ārkkum ariyāṉai,
kaṭi cēr taṇ am tuḷāyk kaṇṇi puṉaintāṉ-taṉṉai, kaṇṇaṉai,
ceṭi ār ākkai aṭiyāraic cērtal tīrkkum tirumālai,
aṭiyēṉ kāṇpāṉ alaṟṟuvaṉ; itaṉiṉ mikku ōr ayarvu uṇṭē?
(I–5–7)

Translation

This humble self of meagre intellect pines to meet
Kaṇṇaṉ, sporting tulacī garland, cool and lovely, of fragrance sweet,
Beyond the Comprehension of one and all (however great),
'Tirumāl', who, unto those that seek Him, does cut out
Their bondage dense; is there anything more indiscreet?

Note

The preceding song ended on a despondent note, showing the Āḻvār sinking down, due to the poignance of separation from the Lord. The merciful Lord would not run the risk of

testing him anymore, and was about to oblige him with His presence. Sensing this, however, the Āḻvār was once more weighed down by inferiority complex, egging him on to retreat again. The Āḻvār has all along vociferously condemned those who are content with mere self-enjoyment (Kaivalya) after perennial disembodiment, that is, liberation from the cycle of birth and death, which is far inferior to the bliss of constant service unto the Lord in Heaven. In the present context, however, the Āḻvār is inclined to hold that even this would be wholesome, as compared to a state of embodiment such as his, with its potentiality for such blasphemous conduct as pining for the Lord's presence and mixing with Him, thereby defiling His sacred person. This is indeed the limit for the Āḻvār's humility (naicya).

uṇṭāy ulaku ēḻ munnamē; umiḻntu māyaiyāl pukku,
uṇṭāy veṇṇey ciṟu maṉicar uvalai ākkai nilai eyti;
maṇ tāṉ cōrntatu uṇṭēlum, maṉicarkku ākum pīr ciṟitum
aṇṭāvaṇṇam, maṇ karaiya, ney-ūṇ maruntō? māyōṉē (I–5–8)

Translation

Wondrous Lord, Once you ate up all the worlds seven
And then spat them out, You then came at your volition
Into this world, assuming the frail form of a human
And ate all the butter (in Gokul) leaving no remnant;
Could it be that you thus sought to dissolve the remnants
Of mud still sticking inside and keep off indigestion.
The fell sickness that befalls humans? [illegible] it wasn't that)

Note

We are indeed under a deep debt of gratitude to these intellectual stalwarts, our great *Pūrvācāryas*, [illegible] hardly repay. Look at how they have delved in and unfolded the genesis of this song, from the way it has been worded. The Lord was bent upon having a rapport with the Āḻvār and hit upon a plan which would work well and bring round the Āḻvār, shaking off his inferiority complex. There ensued a dialogue wherein the Lord wanted to elicit from the Āḻvār the purpose of His having come down to Gokul,

as a cowherd and gobbled up all the available butter. When the Āḷvār pleaded ignorance, the Lord Himself gave out that it was just an antidote against the ill-effects of the mud, if any, still sticking inside His stomach, which had once kept all the seven worlds within and thrown them out after some time. The Āḷvār could hardly swallow such a fantastic explanation, firstly, because of the heavy time-lag between the two events and secondly, because there was no reason why He should have appropriated to Himself all the butter produced in that pastoral village, if it was to be a mere medicine. The Āḷvār opined that the Lord ate up avidly all that butter because it was produced by the loving hands of His devotees, a produce which He coveted very much and would not mind taking even stealthily, when not given for the asking. Precisely here, the Āḷvār fell into the Lord's trap. The Lord was quick to point out that the Āḷvār was dear to Him for the same reason and, by trying to keep aloof from Him, he would only join the rank and file of those who tried to keep the butter from Him.

māyōm; tīya alavalaip peru mā vañcap pēy vīyat
tūya kuḷaviyāy viṭap pāl amutā amutu ceytiṭṭa
māyaṉ, vāṉōr taṉit talaivaṉ, malarāḷ maintaṉ, ev uyirkkum
tāyōṉ, tammāṉ, eṉ ammāṉ, ammā mūrttiyaic cārntē. (I–5–9)

Translation

The unique Lord of celestials, *Malarāḷ's* (the lotus-born Lakṣmī's) Consort,
A veritable Mother (unto all) who His own Sovereign is,
As well as mine, the typical (but wondrous) babe that killed outright
The highly treacherous and loquacious demoness
Whose poisonous milk He sucked as if it were nectar (amṛt)
Close unto the exalted one am I; may we never again be apart.

Note

Here is the continuation of the dialogue referred to in the preceding stanza. The Āḷvār observed that unlike the palatable butter, mixing with him, a terrible sinner, will be bitter

like poison. But the Lord had a ready reply for this also. He pointed out that even the milk of the poisonous breast of Pūtanā, the evil-minded imposter of a mother, was sucked by Him, with great relish, as if it were nectar. So saying, He pounced upon the Āḻvār and got hold of him. The Āḻvār also responded by avowing that he will never again part from Him. The line in this song narrating that the Lord, typical of a tender babe, relished the poisonous milk tendered by Pūtanā like nectar, follows the text of 'Harivaṁśaṁ'.*

cārnta iru val-viṉaikaḷum carittu, māyap paṟṟu aṟuttu,
tīrntu, taṉpāl maṉam vaikkat tirutti, vīṭu tiruttuvāṉ:
ārnta ñāṉac cuṭar āki, akalam kīḻ mēl aḷavu iṟantu,
nērnta uruvāy, aruvākum ivaṟṟiṉ uyirām neṭumālē. (I–5–10)

Translation

Of resplendent knowledge, full and flooding,
All things, with or without form, He is pervading
Up and down and all around; Neṭumāl (of love supreme)
Rid me of my age-long sins of commission and omission and in Him
Rooted my mind firmly, freed from ignorance and attachments
And is now intent upon giving heaven a face-lift(to put me in).

Note

Immensely pleased with the assurance given by the Āḻvār in the previous song not to get parted from Him any more, the Lord now contemplates putting the Āḻvār in Heaven, so as to eliminate the possible risk of further separation from Him. And for this purpose, the Lord, in His unbounded love for the Āḻvār, wants to renovate even that Eternal Land, ever fresh and pure, which hardly needs touching up or a face-lift, as such! Indeed, The Āḻvār feels enthralled by the Lord's extraordinary love for him (as the word 'Neṭumāl' in the text connotes).

* 'Sthanyaṁ tat viṣa sammiśraṁ rasyamāsīth jagad Guro'.

mālē! māyap perumāṉē! mā māyavaṉē! eṉṟu eṉṟu,
mālē ēṟi māl aruḷāl maṉṉu kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
pāl ēy tamiḻar icaikārar pattar paravum āyirattiṉ
pālē paṭṭa ivai pattum vallārkku illai parivatē. (I–5–11)

Translation

Those conversant with these songs ten,
Out of the thousand sung by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Firm recipient of the Lord's grace, in ecstatic adoration
Of His wondrous deeds and glorious traits, evoking the admiration
Alike of the 'Sweet-as-milk' Tamil-Scholars, devotees and musicians,
Shall for ever be free from affliction.

Notes

(i) The accent here is on the redemptive grace of the Lord, Who, by His condescending love, reclaimed the Āḻvār, thwarting his attempt to run away from Him in a frightfully unsettled state of mind.

(ii) These songs are of matchless grandeur and inestimable value for those who want to revel in singing sweet songs of a high order. And again, for those who want to delve into their meanings and eke out their time usefully, these songs afford unlimited scope.

First Centum—Sixth Decad (I-6)
(Parivatu il īcaṉai)

Preamble

Following the pattern, hitherto noticed, of bringing to the fore a particular auspicious trait of the Lord in each decad (Tiruvāymoḻi), 'Swārādatva' (i.e.) easy worshippability of the Lord is emphasised in this decad. Unlike the minor deities whom it is very hard to propitiate, what with the sacrifice of goats and hens and other such harsh demands on their votaries, the Lord is pleased with whatever is offered to Him lovingly, with pious will. Being

above wants of any kind, it is unthinkable that He would want from us any offering at all. God sets greater value upon the devotion of the heart than the material value of outward offerings. He hates hypocrisy and estimates the sincerity of the soul. In His song Celestial, He has affirmed: ' Whoever offers Me in faith and love, a leaf (as Draupati did), a flower (as Gajendra did), a fruit (as Sabhari did), water poured forth (as Ambarīṣâ did), that offering I accept, lovingly made with pious will. Things, easy of procurement for all, including the poorest of the poor, offered, not for expiation of sins or securing other ends but considering giving to Me as an end in itself and out of sheer inability to exist without making a love-gift to Me are indeed acceptable. In the absence of the devotee's inability to offer anything for eating, I consume even the leaves and flowers offered. Vidura gave me plantain skins and Kuchela gave me but poor beaten rice and yet, I devoured them all with great avidity, like a famished fellow ''.

The outward offerings may be trifles but, in God's eye, they carry much weight, when offered in humility and devotion. Once some Princes had a desire to offer campaka flower to Lord Jagannatha at Pūri, knowing that it is His favourite flower. On going to the flower market, they found that all but a single flower had already been sold out. Each one of the Princes was keen on buying it and offered competitive price. One of them staked his entire fortune, bought the flower and offered it to the Lord. That night, God appeared in the Prince's dream and said, " The debt of thy flower is very heavy. I cannot bear its weight '', thus showing His gracious acceptance of the sincerely made offering. As already stated, the Lord is above wants of any kind, and yet He greedily grabs at the selfless service rendered unto Him by the devotees disinterestedly, as an end in itself. In this decad, the Āḻvār enjoys and extols this great trait of the Lord.

parivatu il īcaṉaip pāṭi virivatu mēval uṟuvīr!
pirivakai iṉṟi nal nīr tūy, purivatuvum pukai pūvē. (I–6–1)

Translation

Ye zealous seekers of salvation, rise to your full stature,
Singing the praise of our griefless God;

Serve Him with water pure, seeking no personal good,
Burn incense before Him and flowers do offer.

Notes

(i) This song is addressed to the seekers of salvation who should naturally rise to their full stature through complete expansion, rather, realisation of their true or essential nature.

(ii) Being the repository of innumerable auspicious traits, a veritable fountain of inexhaustible bliss, the Lord is naturally free from grief of any kind, on His own. But then, He grieves over the woes of His countless subjects and this trait of commisseration with the miseries of others, with a complete sense of identity and deep compassion for them, is indeed praiseworthy. Actually, this heads the list of many good qualities noticed in Śrī Rāma by the Citizens of Ayodhyā and enumerated by them in King Daśaratha's court. Even so, the question is asked, why the Almighty Lord who can jolly well quell all our miseries in no time, should grieve for us, as we weaklings do, merely expressing our grief over the miseries of others, being incapable of giving them any kind of relief. This erroneous impression can be set at naught if we take into account our own every day experience, the parents feeling distressed over the sufferings of the young ones, notwithstanding the active steps taken by the former promptly to administer the requisite relief to the latter. Draupati, in dire distress, was no doubt prevented from getting disrobed due to the plentiful supply of clothes arranged for by Lord Kṛṣṇa, and yet, He cried out His heart, lamenting that He remained a debtor unto Draupati, having failed to be present at the scene of the dastardly occurence and worse still, having failed to avert the incident altogether. When Gajendra, the elephant raised a pitecus alarm for succour at the end of a titanic struggle with its mighty opponent, the crocodile, the Lord went post-haste to the scene of distress and retrieved the elephant. All the same,

the Lord very much repented that He had not rushed to Gajendrā's aid much earlier.

(iii) Serving the Lord who is but our Father, should by-no-means be difficult, seeing that the son need have no qualms nor be fastidious and fretsome, in regard to the food served to his own father, by virtue of the natural bonds of Kinship and mutual concern. Discoursing on this song, Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar pointed out that the text of the song bears out that no flower is taboo, and in the name of burning incense, as part of worship, even waste wooden chips from the carpenter's chisel could be burnt and smoke raised therefrom. There is no specification, as such, regarding the flower to be offered and the incense to be burnt. When his stalwart disciple, Nañcīyar, observed that there is a śāstraic injunction against the use of the flower, known in Samskṛit as 'Karḍakārika', for the Lord's worship, Bhaṭṭārya elucidated that the injunction in question is solely weighted in favour of the worshipper, to eliminate the risk involved in plucking this flower from its thorny plant.

matuvār taṉ am tūḷāyāṉ mutu vēta mutalavaṉukku,
etu ētu eṉ paṇi eṉṉātu, atuvē āḷ-ceyyum iṭē. (I–6–2)

Translation

'What service is there, and that too, for poor me,
Appropriate to the Primate, the colossal Lord, by Vedas revealed,
Wearer of nice, cool, 'tulacī' garland, shedding honey?''
If one doesn't think so (and shrink), by him is the Lord well served indeed.

Notes

(i) Having ruled out, in the preceding song, the restriction regarding the thing to be offered to the Lord, the Āḻvār now stresses the fact that there is also no restriction regarding the persons eligible to serve Him. If one does not shrink back from the Lord's service, in

bewildering amazement that there is hardly any service that can be rendered, appropriate to the colossal stature of the Lord and, that too, by one with serious limitations, it is as good as having served the Lord. In other words, there is hardly any scope for such a feeling of aloofness.

(ii) Even a faded garland coming in contact with the Lord's person will become fresh again and shed copious quantities of honey. That being so, the devotee need not have any qualms in regard to the offerings to be made.

(iii) As Bādarāyaṇa (*Sage Vyāsa*) has pointed out in his 'Brahma Sūtra,' *the Lord can be known only through the authority of the Vedas, as distinguished from Ocular and inferential knowledge. The Supreme Lord is revealed by the Vedas, as the first and foremost.

iṭum eṭuppum il īcaṉ māṭu viṭātu eṉ maṉaṉē;
pāṭum eṉ nā avaṉ pāṭal; āṭum eṉ aṅkam aṇaṅkē. (I–6–3)

Translation

My mind can never be away from Īcaṉ (Lord Supreme),
Who makes no distinction 'tween high and low;
My tongue His glory sings at all times
While my body danceth in ecstatic glow.

Notes

(i) The Lord does not extend special favours by reason of one's high parentage, calibre and conduct, nor does He give up those of low descent, meagre intellect and poor conduct. He is absolutely impartial. †Prahlāda and Vibhīṣaṇa of Asura and Rākṣasa clan, respectively, were among His beneficiaries. If the other Asuras and Rākṣasas came to grief the fault was not with

* 'Śāstra Yōnitvāt'.
† "Devānām Dānavānāñca Sāmānyam adhidhaivatam".

the Lord. It is like a few persons falling, now and then, into the tank dug up for the common good of all and killing themselves.

(ii) It is noteworthy that the Āḻvār stands rivetted to the Lord by word, deed and thought.

aṇaṅku eṉa āṭum eṉ aṅkam vaṇaṅki vaḻipaṭum; īcaṉ
piṇaṅki amarar pitaṟṟum kuṇaṅkeḻu koḷkaiyiṉāṉē. (I–6–4)

Translation

Īcaṉ (the Lord) I venerate, dancing in gay abandon,
Is the natural repository of many an auspicious trait.
Leaving the celestials in the high Heaven,
Entranced and engaged in endless debate.

Note

As the Lord said in Bhagavad-Gītā, His lover's thoughts are rivetted to Him, their lives are nestled in Him and their conversation is solely about Him, full of mutual enlightenment and entertainment. The debate, referred to, in this Song, could arise from the adoration of the Lord by the Celestials, from different angles, one group talking about the Lord's transcendent glory and the other about His easy accessibility and loving condescension. The Āḻvār marvels at that even his faculties vie with the experience of that exalted band in heaven.

koḷkai koḷāmai ilātāṉ eḷkal irākam ilātāṉ:
viḷkai viḷḷāmai virumpi uḷ kalantārkku ōr amutē. (I–6–5)

Translation

Not given to likes and dislikes, acceptance or rejection,
Of (service from) devotees, looking to their attainments alone,
A nectar of incomparable excellence, the Lord is
Unto those that with Him do mingle, giving up all else.

Note

In the preceding song, the Āḻvār presented to us the Lord as One, who would welcome to His benevolent fold every one,

without distinction of high and low, seeking His protection. And now, we are told that the Lord is free from likes and dislikes and is, therefore, not prone to extend preferential treatment to some and be indifferent to others on the basis of their individual attainments, while enlisting them in His service. All that He looks for is whether these devotees are steadfast in their devotion, true to their essential nature of being the objects of His sole enjoyment (ananya bhōgyatva) or merely seek from Him the fulfilment of their own personal desires, the odds and ends. While the latter class seeking the lesser fruits get what they want and also get parted from the Lord in the bargain, to the former class who stand rivetted to, and nestled, in Him, He is a veritable nectar of incomparable excellence, ever fresh and insatiable.

amutam amararkaṭku īnta nimir cutar-āḻi neṭumāl
amutilum āṟṟa iṉiyaṉ: nimir tirai nīḷ kaṭalāṉē. (I–6–6)

Translation

Of limitless glory, Neṭumāl, holding the discus
Of mounting radiance and reclining on the spacious
Milk-Ocean of surging waves, is more appetising indeed
Than the ambrosia which unto Amarars (Devas) He once delivered.

Note

The Āḻvār has nothing but contemptuous pity for the Devas who sought the 'amṛt' obtained by churning the Milk-Ocean, instead of the far more delicious Lord holding the effulgent discus, enchanting beyond words. Although the Āḻvār's contempt for the Devas is not explicit from the text of the song, the episode of delivering the "amṛt" to the Devas, referred to, in the first line of the song, pales into insignificance before the Lord's own nectarean presence and exquisite charm enjoyed by the Āḻvār in the second line of the song and thus indirectly exhibits the Devas at a disadvantage. The Āḻvār has given yet another name to the Lord, namely, '*One who is more appetising than ambrosia*'. Nampi Tiruvaḻutiṉāṭu Tācar remarked that the Devas

were no better than the bovine species, not looking up and beholding the exquisite charm of the Lord churning and moving around with His thousand sinewy shoulders and the beautiful garlands adorning them. Instead, they were gazing at the ocean, with their heads bent down, content with a mere extract from the salt-water, what a pity !

nīḷ kaṭal cūḷ ilaṅkaik kōṉ tōḷkaḷ talai tuṇiceytāṉ
tāḷkaḷ talaiyil vaṇaṅki, nāḷkaḷ talaikkaḻiminṉē. (I–6–7).

Translation

If you bow unto Him Who Smote
The heads and shoulders of the King
Of Laṅkā, with the long sea as its moat,
The ocean of time, it helps crossing.

kaḻimiṉ toṇṭīrkaḷ! kaḻittut toḻumiṉ avaṉai; toḻutāl,
vaḻi niṉṟa valviṉai māḷvittu aḻiviṉṟi ākkam tarumē. (I–6–8).

Translation

Ye, servants of God, sever your contacts
With all things ungodly and serve the Lord;
Your age-long, sturdy sins, the Lord will cut out
And grant you eternal bliss and beatitude.

taruma arum payaṉ āya tirumakaḷār taṉik kēḷvaṉ
perumai uṭaiya pirāṉār irumai viṉai kaṭivārē. (I–6–9).

Translation

The bliss very dear, Tirumakaḷ's unique Spouse confers,
The Benefactor great (in her glorious company) full of grace,
The fruits of actions, good and bad, He severs,
(The impediments to the free flow of His grace).

Notes

(i) Tirumakaḷ, (Goddess Mahālakṣmī) is the very embodiment of grace.* Her perpetual presence by the side of the

* 'Lakṣmyā saha Hṛṣīkeśo Devyā Kāruṇya rūpayā' (Śrī Pāñcarātra.)

Lord is intended to prepare the ground for the supplication by the individual souls, at all times, without any restriction whatsoever. Although the Lord is the ultimate giver and deliverer, yet He invariably acts only when Mahālakṣmī plays the recommendatory role, mediating and pleading for erring souls.

(ii) For the attainment of final bliss, both merit (Puṇya) and demerit (Pāpa or Sins) are impediments. As Śrī Vedānta Deśika has put it, in his 'Varadarāja Pancāsat', the former is a golden fetter while the latter is an iron fetter. A golden fetter is still a fetter and thus both 'Puṇya' and 'Pāpa' impede one's advancement to the final goal. Hence the need to cut out both, an act of grace galore, on the part of Lakṣmī-Kānta (the gracious Consort of Goddess Mahālakṣmī).

kaṭivār tīya viṉaikaḷ noṭiyārum aḷavaikkaṉ;
koṭiyā aṭu puḷ uyartta vaṭivu ār mātavaṉārē. (I–6–10)

Translation

Mātavaṉ, of exquisite Form,
On whose banner is Garuḍa the bird,
Destroyer of enemies, will, in no time,
Root out the fell sins (we dread).

Note

What is emphasised here is the utmost speed with which Mādhava, the Lord, in conjunction with the Divine Mother, roots out all the evils in us. And what more? The Lord extends to the Soul, reclaimed just then, the same affinity as He holds for the pre-eminent Garuḍa, the 'Ever-free angel-Nitya Sūri'. The reclamation is put through in a trice through the instrumentality of Śrī Mahālakṣmī, who urges: "My Lord, here is the supplicant at your door-step, tossed between birth on one side, and death on the other, and smitten, in between, by maladies, both mental and physical; please bestow your grace and redeem him, turning a blind eye to all his sins; else, you may have to write off the entire '*Līla Vibhūti*' (Sportive universe)".

mātavaṉpāl caṭakōpaṉ tītu avam iṉṟi uraitta
ētam il āyirattu ip pattu ōta vallār piṟavārē. (I–6–11)

Translation

Those initiated in these songs ten,
Out of the thousand flawless songs of Caṭakōpaṉ,
Adoring Mātavaṉ as One above the twin faults
(Of aloofness and abandonment), will from rebirth be freed for ever.

Note

It might be apprehended that the Lord is open to the twin faults of (1) Keeping Himself aloof from us with an air of indifference because of His exaltation, and (2) abandoning us, looking to our truck-loads of vices. The Āḻvār avers, in this decad, that the Lord is above these faults, thereby emphasising His easy worshippability.

First Centum—Seventh Decad (I-7)
Piravittuyar aṟa

Preamble

Easy worshippability apart, the Lord should also be adorable. We see around quite a few persons whom it is easy to please but we don't like to court as there is nothing attractive or prepossessing in them. This decad shows that the Lord is highly adorable because of His extraordinary sweetness. As Nampiḷḷai would have it, the Lord is adorable to such an extent that He grows envious of His devotees and wants to adore them, in turn, having Himself tasted the sweetness of adoration. In ślcka ' Manujatva tiroitena......... ' of Pâdukâ Sahaśram, Śrī Vedânta Deśika observes that, unlike the previous Avatâras when the Lord came all alone, He assumed four forms when He came down as Śrī Râma and the three younger brothers. The purpose behind this was to adore His own pair of sandals which have a high reputation of their own. This He did in His other form as Bharata. Had Râma come alone, He couldn't have achieved this purpose.

piṟavittuyar aṟa ñāṉattuḷ niṉṟu,
tuṟavic cuṭar-viḷakkam talaippeyvār
aṟavaṉai āḻippaṭai antaṇaṉai
maṟaviyai iṉṟi maṉattu vaippārē (I–7–1)

Translation

(Oh, what a pity!) the Lord, gracious and immaculate,
Sporting the effulgent discus, is tenaciously sought
By those votaries wanting no more than to liberate
Themselves from the miseries of birth and death and get lost
In a state of 'Self-enjoyment' (of the Soul in its free state).

Note

Oh, what a pity! After all the rigours of their disciplines, the '*Kevalas*' rest contented with mere liberation from the cycle of birth and death, followed by 'âtmâvalokana' (i.e.) enjoyment of their own selves in the disembodied state. The tragedy of it is heightened by the fact that they invoked the Lord's grace for attaining this state but failed to be enthralled by His exquisite charm. The Āḻvār detests these people for this tragic failure resulting in their foregoing, for ever, the superior bliss of service unto the Lord. No doubt, in I-5-7, the Āḻvār would appear to have had a word of praise for the '*Kevalas*' but that was in a different context. It may be recalled that the Āḻvār, then stung by a gnawing apprehension of his abject lowliness, felt that possession of a body was fraught with the serious risk of his contaminating and defiling the Lord by mixing with Him and that a disembodied state of existence, as in the case of the 'Kevalas', would, therefore, be quite welcome, being the lesser of the two evils.

vaippu ām, maruntu ām, aṭiyarai valviṉait
tuppu ām pulaṉ aintum tuñcakkoṭāṉ avaṉ;
eppāl evarkkum nalattāl uyarntu uyarntu
appālavaṉ eṅkaḷ āyar-koḻuntē. (I–7–2)

Translation

The Lord is, unto His devotees, the treasure fine
And the unfailing drug; unto the senses five

He shan't make them succumb; of towering bliss,
He's above one and all, in all places,
Beyond speech and thought and yet He's (our Gopâla), the shepherd chief!

Note

Having decried and detested, in the preceding stanza, the '*Kevalas*' seeking from the gracious Lord the inferior stature of *Kaivalya*, the Āḻvār now depicts the Lord in relation to those who seek Him as the goal, to the exclusion of everything else. Towering above all, beyond speech and comprehension, He still condescended to come down here as Gopālakṛṣṇa, of amazing simplicity.

âyar-koḻuntāy, avarāl puṭaiyuṇṇum
māyap pirāṉai, eṉ māṇikkac cōtiyai,
tūya amutaip parukip paruki, eṉ
māyap piravi mayarvu aṟuttēṉē. (I–7–3)

Translation

I drank and drank, without intermission, the nectar pure,
The dazzling gem, the mystic Lord of wondrous deeds,
(Gopāla) the shepherd chief, bound and beaten by cowherds
(For theft of butter) and got my nescience, matter-born, severed.

Notes

(i) Speaking about Gopālakṛṣṇa, in the last song, the Āḻvār had before him the entire panorama of His mysterious deeds and by merely meditating on them, he got all his accumulated nescience, born of age-long material contacts, eradicated in *toto*, root and branch.

(ii) In the by-gone days, the Devas got nectar subject to various conditions. Even so, it is by no means comparable to the Āḻvār's uninhibited and unrestricted Divine experience, drinking deep of that pure nectar which cleansed him thoroughly and rooted out his age-long sins sheathed in ignorance.

mayarvu aṟa eṉ maṉattē maṉṉiṉāṉ-taṉṉai,
uyarviṉaiyē tarum oṇ cuṭark kaṟṟaiyai,
ayarvu il amararkaḷ ātik koḷuntai, en
icaiviṉai, en colli vān vituvēnō (I–7–4)

Translation

Oh! what pretext can I find, from Him to part,
The first Lord of Celestials ever alert,
A beautiful bundle of brilliance, heaping on me continually,
Torrents of knowledge and wisdom, who brought me
Round and to root out my ignorance lodged in me firmly?

Notes

(i) In the preceding song, the Āḷvār acknowledged the Lord's benevolence in rooting out all his ignorance. This is exactly what he had prayed for in his supplication to the Lord in the very first song of his first work (Tiruviruttam). Having achieved his purpose, can the Āḷvār now afford to forget the Lord? No, having removed all the vestiges of ignorance in the Āḷvār, the Lord continually resides in his mind, shutting out effectively the further growth of nescience in him. And what more? He is continually heaping upon the Āḷvār torrents of wisdom (Jñāna) and love (Bhakti). A beautiful bundle of brilliance, He is also the first Lord of the 'Nitya Sūrīs' (Eternal Heroes). How can the Āḷvār get himself divested of One, so great and so charming, ever inducing in him a passionate desire to be very close to Him? Thus, nothing is wanting on the Lord's side to admit of a divorce from Him. If at all one wishes to throw odium on such a loving Lord, it can only be a sin-contrived dodge, like the one in the following anecdote:

(ii) A peasant boy who visited his father-in-law, was asked by the latter to help him to work a water-lift. The two of them started the work early in the morning and the boy who was high up on the lift, naturally felt tired when it was past mid-day. The father-in-law did not, however, have the courtesy to give the

young son-in-law the much-needed relief. There upon, the latter, in sheer exasperation, spat on the back of the elder, just to provoke him. "How cool!" exclaimed the elder and went on with the work. The boy sharply jumped down, saying, "Better get hold of one who will spit on you hot!"

viṭuvēṉō-eṉ viḷakkai, eṉ āviyai,
naṭuvē vantu uyyak koḷkiṉṟa nātaṉai,
toṭuvē ceytu iḷa āycciyar kaṇṇiṉuḷ
viṭavē ceytu viḻikkum pirāṉaiyē. (I-7-5)

Translation

The amorous Lord who, by His sweet looks,
Enticed away the young damsels (of Gokula)
Is my Soul, the beacon light, Who unto me reveals
All things; how can I from Him separation brook,
My Saviour grand who did on me alight, all on a sudden?

Note

The damsels of Gokula would even spurn Heaven, but not give up the inseparable company of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The Lord having enthralled the Āḻvār likewise, there is no question of his giving Him up.

pirāan, peru nilam kīṇṭavaṉ, piṉṉum
virāay malart tuḻāy vēynta muṭiyaṉ,
marāmaram eyta māyavaṉ eṉṉuḷ
irāṉ eṉil, piṉṉai yāṉ oṭṭuvēṉō (I-7-6)

Translation

How can I at all survive, if the Benefactor great
Who once retrieved the Earth from the ocean,
On whose crown is the tulacī garland of aroma sweet,
The wonder-Lord whose arrow sped thro' the trees seven,
Should desert me and stay not in my heart?

Note

This is the Āḻvār's reply to a question supposed to have been put to him as to what he would do, in case the Lord forsook

him once again. The Āḻvār rules out such a contingency, seeing that the Lord is a self-less Benefactor like Sandal paste, flower, southerly breeze and the Moon, catering to the happiness of others, seeking nothing in return. Surely, the Āḻvār would not be a willing party to the separation and he just can't survive in such an eventuality. As a matter of fact, the Āḻvār cannot bring himself to believe that the Lord would at all leave him and go without his permission. Did He not, as Śrī Rāma, go even to the extent of clearing up the misgivings in the mind of Sugrīva about His ability to vanquish Vāli and infusing the requisite confidence? Could such a one desert the Āḻvār, who has firm faith in Him?

yāṉ oṭṭi eṉṉuḷ iruttuvaṉ eṉṟilaṉ;
tāṉ oṭṭi vantu, eṉ taṉi neñcai vañcittu,
ūṉ oṭṭi niṉṟu, eṉ uyiril kalantu, iyal-
vāṉ oṭṭumō-iṉi eṉṉai nekiḻkkavē? (I–7–7)

Translation

In my mind I lodged Him not, on my own;
Pledged to get in, the Lord did, on His own,
Enter my mind imperious, unsought,
Stuck avidly to my body and soul and wrought
A silent change in me, drawing me unto Him, so well.
To part from me hence, will such a One agree at all?

Notes

(i) The Lord entered the Āḻvār's mind, pledged, as it were, to do so. This would show that the Āḻvār took no initiative in the matter. On the other hand, self-reliant and imperious that he was, he stood aloof, very much away from Him. But once a determined Lord took possession of the Āḻvār, the latter came under His magic spell, just like the miser who yielded to the resolute beggar, in the anecdote cited below.

(ii) There was a Brāhman who was an abject miser; another was on his way to this man's house to get a breakfast. People on the way told the latter that the man he was going to, was the most sordid wretch who would not

give food to any one. Undaunted, the beggar sought out the miser and begged for food, showing his great need. The miser was adamant in refusing food but the beggar would not leave him. The miser had to yield at last and when he asked the beggar to produce his eating plate, the latter opened his garment and showed it. The miser grumbled and exclaimed "He who intends cutting another's throat, certainly brings the sword with him". So saying, he couldn't help handing over to the persevering, rather provoking beggar, a little bit of rice and sauce to get rid of him.

eṉṉai nekiḻkkilum, eṉṉuṭai naṉ-neñcam
taṉṉai akalvikkat tāṉum killāṉ iṉi:
piṉṉai neṭum paṇait tōḷ makiḻ pīṭu uṭai
muṉṉai amarar muḻumutal tāṉē. (I-7-8)

Translation

With His sinewy shoulders in Piṉṉai nestled,
The joyous Lord Who unto the hoary Celestials
Is all in all, cannot from Him separate, with all His might,
My chastened mind, in Him entwined so well, albeit
He, His grip on me, loosens and makes me stay apart.

Note

The Āḻvār avers that history will not repeat itself. Even if the Almighty Lord, in His unbridled independence, tried His utmost to keep the Āḻvār away, He wouldn't succeed in putting aside his chastened mind, inseparably steeped in Him. This robust confidence has indeed the solid backing of Piṉṉai (Goddess Nappinna) the unfailing Intercessor through whose good offices the Āḻvār courted the Lord.

amarar muḻumutal ākiya ātiyai,
amararkku amutu īnta āyar-koḻuntai,
amara aḻumpat tuḻāvi, eṉ āvi
amarat taḻuviṟṟu; iṉi akalummō? (I-7-9)

Translation

The Primate Who unto Celestials is the fountain source
Of all felicities, Who unto *Amarar* (Devas) delivered ambrosia,
The Chief of the cowherds got into my soul, in tight embrace,
With pleasure immense; Could He from me be apart anymore?

Note

Unto the Devas, who wanted 'Amṛt' (ambrosia), the mere extract from the ocean and not the Lord Himself, He gave the Amṛt; He, however, gave Himself to the Cowherds in whose midst He was born, because they wanted Him, the real 'Amṛt' and not that artificial stuff. The Āḷvār's soul got steeped in Him to such an extent and in such a manner that the one couldn't be told from the other and hence there was no question of separation, as if they were two different entities.

akalil akalum; aṇukil aṇukum;
pukalum ariyaṉ, poru allaṉ emmāṉ:
nikar il avaṉ pukaḻ pāṭi iḷaippu ilam
pakalum iravum paṭintu kuṭaintē. (I–7–10)

Translation

Apart from them who from Him keep apart,
Close to them who unto Him get close,
Beyond approach (to the ungodly) but easy of access
(To devotees); entranced do I sing His glory peerless,
Day and night and never feel satiate.

Note

In the immense struggle between the Lord on the one side and the worldings on the other, the latter, swayed by the stronger pull of earthly pleasures, stray away from Him. Indeed, the Lord grieves over this state of affairs. Unto those who seek Him exclusively, He responds so well that it is said, when man walks towards God, He runs towards him. When man ascends to the foot-stool of God, He enters the soul of man.

Inexhaustible are His auspicious qualities and therefore it is that we can never reach the end and feel satiated in singing His praise.

kuṭaintu vaṇṭu uṇṇum tuḷāy muṭiyāṉai
aṭainta teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
miṭainta col-toṭai āyirattu ip pattu
uṭaintu nōykaḷai ōṭuvikkumē. (I–7–11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the well-knit thousand,
Composed by Caṭakōpaṉ of Teṉkurukūr, in worship bound
To the Lord, wearing on His crown tulacī garland,
Whose honey the swarming bees partake, will all our ill disband.

First Centum—Eighth Decad (I-8)
Ōṭum puḷ ēṟi

Preamable

In this decad, the Āḻvār bringsto the fore the Lord's quality of ' Uprightness ' (*ārjava* or *rujuḥ*), His transparence in word, deed and thought, free from sophistry, duplicity, mental reservation, mischievous distortion etc. The Lord would not mean one thing, say another and do a third thing. When Sūrpaṇakhā saw Śrī Rāma at Pañcavaṭi and interrogated Him about His personal history, there would have been nothing wrong if He had tactfully withheld the truth from the demoness. But it was not in His grain to do so and hence He gave out the actual fact with remarkable sincerity.

Tirukkurukaippirāṉ Piḷḷāṉ, the earliest glossator on ' Tiruvāy moḻi,' holds that this decad highlights the Lord's wealth (*Aiśvarya*). The other commentators, Periyavāccāṉ Piḷḷai and Vaṭakku Tiruvīti Piḷḷai, however, prefer to bring into focus the Lord's ' *ārjava* ' in this decad, as stated at the outset.

ōṭum puḷ ēṟi, cūṭum taṇ-tuḷāy,
nīṭu niṉṟavai āṭum: ammāṉē. (I–8–1)

Translation

The Lord (in heaven) does avidly mingle
With the exalted celestials, one and all;
Takes He a lightning ride on a bird (Garuḍa)
And sports the cool tulacī garland delectable.

Note

This refers to the state of affairs in the yonder heaven. The Lord is said to regale one and all over there, by granting them suitable opportunities for rendering Him the appropriate service.

ammāṉāyp piṉṉum em māṇpum āṉāṉ:
vem mā vāy kīṇṭa cem mā kaṇṇaṉē. (I–8–2)

Translation

Our Sire (the Lord) with large, red eyes
Came down as Kaṇṇaṉ (and mingled with us)
Tore He the mouth of the demon fierce,
Who (to Kill Him) came as a horse,
Many indeed are His incarnations glorious

Note

Although specific mention has been made here of the Lord's incarnation as Kṛṣṇa, there is also a broad reference to all His Avatāras as well, wherein He mixes with the worldlings with remarkable transparence, even as He does with the denizens in heaven.

kaṇ āvāṉ eṉṟum maṇṇōr viṇṇōrkku:
taṇ ār vēṅkaṭa viṇṇōr veṟpaṉē. (I–8–3)

Translation

The Lord who is like unto a pair of eyes
For those on Earth and Heaven,

Stays in Vēṅkaṭam, cool and nice,
The Celestials' favourite haven.

Note

Like unto the mother of twins lying in between her two kids, the Lord stays in Tiruvēṅkaṭam (in Andhra Pradeś), the meeting ground of the Earthlings and the Celestials. The Āḻvār even goes to the extent of calling this glorious hilly retreat as the home of the Celestials, on the ground that the Celestials visiting it far exceed the number of the earthly visitors. Actually, it is the amazing simplicity of the Supreme Lord, making Himself easily accessible even to the monkeys and hunters around this sacred spot, that drags the celestials on to this centre. It is reverently held by our elders that the fauna and flora on the sacred Hills are but Celestials transplanted there.

veṟpai oṉṟu eṭuttu, oṟkam iṉṟiyē,
niṟkum ammāṉ cīr kaṟpaṉ vaikalē. (I–8–4)

Translation

Let me every day utter (and adore)
The Lord's grace galore;
Mount (Govardhana) He did lift
And stood with ease (holding it aloft).

Notes

(i) Periyāḻvār extols the effortless holding by Śrī Kṛṣṇa of Govardhana Mountain, days on end, without the slightest strain on His fingers and nails (Periyāḻvār Tirumoḻi III-5-10).

(ii) Śrī Kūrattāḻvāṉ also exclaims, in sloka 45 of *Varadarāja Stavaṁ* that the Lord held Mount Govardhana continually for seven days and yet, His fingers were as fresh as ever.

(iii) The irate Indra, out to destroy the pastoral life of Gokul, could have well been destroyed by Śrī Kṛṣṇa but He relented, hoping that Indra would soon recover

from this temporary aberration caused by the deprivation of the offerings. At the same time, He shielded the entire pastoral community by holding the mountain aloft like an umbrella for seven long days, till Indra's fury abated. The Āḻvār, on his part, would never feel tired of recounting this episode, rather he subsists on it.

vaikalum veṇṇey kaikalantu uṇṭāṉ
poy kalavātu eṉ mey kalantāṉē. (I–8–5)

Translation

The Lord stretched His hands as far as He could,
(Snatched) the butter and ate (as much as He liked);
Truly, He my body liked in that fashion
And there ensued the grand fusion.

Note

On the one hand, the Āḻvār goes into raptures in contemplation of the Lord's auspicious attributes and, on the other, the Lord covets the Āḻvār's body with the same avidity with which He swallowed butter in Gokula.

kalantu eṉ āvi nalam koḻ nātaṉ
pulaṉ koḻ māṇāy nilam koṇṭāṉē. (I–8–6)

Translation

The Lord Who unto me adhered
And did my Soul make good
Took, as a Midget (Vāmaṉa) of enthralling form,
Land (of three strides) as alms.

Note

As dwarfish Vāmaṉa of bewitching personality, He enticed away Emperor Bali and made all his possessions, His own; likewise, mixing now with the Āḻvār, the Lord has taken possession of his soul and made him His sole servitor, in keeping with his essential nature.

kontān ēḷ viṭai, uṇṭān ēḷ vaiyam,
taṉ tāmam ceytu eṉ eṉ tāṉ āṉāṉē. (I–8–7)

Translation

Tamed He the unruly bulls seven,
Held He in His stomach the worlds seven
And thinking my own thoughts (in reverse direction)
He took to my body as if it were cool heaven.

Notes

(i) To win the hand of the bewitching young damsel, Nappiṉṉai, a niece of Yaśodhā, the unruly bulls were the impediments; the Lord, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, overcame them and secured the coveted bride. Likewise, the Āḷvār's sins, the impediments for the Lord getting at him, were rooted out by Him and the Āḷvār taken possession of.

(ii) During the pericd of deluge, the Lord held within Himself all the worlds and sustained them and now, He could sustain Himself only by entering the Āḷvār's soul and dissolving into it.

(iii) The Āḷvār was pining for his ascent to Heaven, dipping in the Sacred river Vrajā, coursing on its border and chanting Sāma Veda in heaven; these very thoughts the Lord would, however, think in the reverse order, namely, pining for the Āḷvār's body in Tirunakari, dipping in the river Tāmraparṇi and singing the hymns composed by the Sweet-tongued poet (Madhura Kavi) in adoration of the Āḷvār.

āṉāṉ āṉ-āyaṉ mīṉōṭu ēṉamum
tāṉ āṉāṉ, eṉṉil, tāṉ āya caṅkē. (I–8–8)

Translation

Myriads are the Lord's incarnations;
As the Cowherd He came down,
Fish, Boar and many other forms
He took, just to get hold of me.

Note

The Āḻvār feels that the innumerable Avatāras of the Lord were all for his delectation, mainly directed towards getting hold of him and uniting with him.

caṅku cakkaram aṅkaiyil koṇṭāṉ
eṅkum tāṉāya naṅkaḷ nātaṉē. (I–8–9)

Translation

Conch and discus, our Lord holds in His lovely hands
No matter where and in what form He descends.

Note

The Lord who thus incarnates, for my sake, through different gates of birth, always bears the inseparable Conch and Discus, like unto the potion carried by some to entice people. These may, however, be visible only to some Godly souls and not all. The Lord's descent could be likened to the Earthly Kings moving round their cities during nights, disguised in black clothes, to study men and matters at first hand, and locate miscreants operating under cover of darkness. The security forces or bodyguards also keep stirring about during those occasions, suitably masked, ready at hand, in an emergency call from the King. The Conch and Discus and other intimate attendants of the Lord, likewise, keep Him company during the Avatāras.

nātaṉ, ñālam koḷ pātaṉ eṉ ammāṉ,
ōtam pōl kiḷar vēta nīraṉē. (I–8–10)

Translation

The Sovereign Master (of the whole universe) whose feet
Measured all the worlds is my Sire upright fit, indeed
For the Vedas (vociferous like the ocean) to talk about.

Note

The Āḻvār, who was all along maintaining that the Supreme Lord's numerous incarnations were all for his sake, now says: "Who am I to voice forth the loving tenderness of

the Lord, His uprightness which induced Him to incarnate so many times and in so many ways? None is more competent to talk about Him Who, as Tṛivikrama, set His feet on one and all without distinction of high and low, than the Vedas, vociferous like the oceanic waters, in singing His glorious traits".

nirpurai vaṇṇaṉ-cīr caṭakōpaṉ
nērtal āyirattu ōrtal ivaiyē. (I–8–11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the thousand
Sung by Caṭakōpaṉ reveal his view profound
That the Lord of water—tint
Is like water, pliable and transparent.

Note

The terminal stanza in each of the preceding decads set forth the good results flowing from the study or recital of the stanzas in that decad. This end-song is, however, silent in this regard; instead, it says that, in this decad, the Āḷvār has expressed his considered view, the one that is crystal-clear to him from the entire hymnal, namely, the Lord is transparent, progressive and pliable like water whose complexion He bears

First Centum—Ninth Decad (I-9)
(Ivaiyum avaiyum)

Preamble

If the Lord's flow of grace unto the hitherto starved Soul were to be full and flooding, all of a sudden, the Subject cannot stand it and will just get swept off his feet. It is a matter of common knowledge how babes are fed through a graded course, beginning with breast milk, a little gruel some time later, and then, small bits of rice and so on. If, out of misplaced love, a parent fed the young one straightaway on adult scale–rice, curry and all that–the

result would be disastrous. As in the case of food, in the matter of imparting education also, one goes step by step. Little wonder then, the omniscient Lord regulates the influx of His grace in such a manner that the recipient is able to stomach it all right.

As is oft repeated in these pages, the Lord's grace is the sole means for attaining Him and yet, against the above background, the Āḻvār was not straightaway conferred the final bliss right at the beginning when he prayed to the Lord (opening song of Tiruviruttam) for the termination of existence in his foul body. The Āḻvār had to pass through a course of shock treatment, experiencing alternately the bliss of Divine presence and union and the cruel pangs of separation, whetting his appetite and enriching his Divine love and wisdom all the time. Before wearing a heavy ornament in the ear which is pretty delicate, one has to gradually prepare the ground by enlarging the ear-hole by stages, first inserting a small piece of string, then a thin metallic ring or chip and so on. Again, one who has been on a month's fast, either due to sickness or as a matter of penance, has to restart taking food only by stages, rice ground into a paste being smeared on the body, oral administration of gruel of low consistency, so on and so forth. The Lord, according to the Āḻvār's own admission in this decad as well as IV-5-5, unfolds unto the Āḻvār His glorious traits and deeds by stages, consistent with his capacity for in-take. (See aphorism 115 of Ācārya Hṛdayam). It would indeed be too much for the Āḻvār to bear if he were conferred, all at once, bliss enjoyed by the Eternal Angels in the Lord's close proximity in Heaven. No doubt, the Lord covets the Āḻvār's body, being the last of the series of bodies donned by him, in which the Lord has now been able to reclaim him. And yet He would not straightaway jump into the crown of his head, much as He would like to. If He did so, it would doubtless bring about the sudden collapse of the Āḻvār, like unto the pauper from birth, who suddenly comes by a sizable treasure, succumbing to the shock. He would first get near the Āḻvār, stand close to him, get into his hip, thence move upwards, to the region of his heart from there, step on to the shoulder, enter his tongue, peep through his eyes, pause for a while on the forehead and then reach the head, His ultimate destination. It is this trait of a well-regulated flow of the Lord's grace that the Āḻvār admires and brings out in this decad.

ivaiyum avaiyum uvaiyum ivarum avarum uvarum
evaiyum evarum taṉṉuḷē ākiyum ākkiyum kākkum
avaiyuḷ taṉimutal emmāṉ, kaṇṇa-pirāṉ, eṉ amutam,
cuvaiyaṉ: tiruviṉ maṇāḷaṉ eṉṉuṭaic cūḻal uḷāṉē. (I-9-1)

Translation

Around me is my Liege-Lord, my ambrosia,
The great Lover, Tiru's (Mahālakṣmī's) Consort, Kaṇṇaṉ,
The sole cause and Internal Controller, pervading all beings all over,
(Both Sentient and non-sentient) and sustaining them all within Him.

cūḻal palapala vallāṉ; tollai am kālattu ulakaik
kēḻal oṉṟu āki iṭanta kēcavaṉ eṉṉuṭai ammāṉ;
vēḻa-maruppai ocittāṉ; viṇṇavarkku eṇṇal ariyāṉ;
āḻa neṭuṅ kaṭal cērntāṉ: avaṉ eṉ arukaliläṉē. (I-9-2)

Translation

Near me is my Lord of many descents, Who, as a peerless Boar,
Once retrieved the Earth from the ocean; Killed He a tusker,
As Kēcavaṉ, smashing its tusks; much beyond the comprehension
Of Viṇṇavar (Devas), He reclined on the deep and vast ocean.

Note

There are two different episodes about the Earth having been picked out of the ocean.

(a) Hiraṇyākṣa, the demon with golden eyes, had rolled up the Earth like a mat, tucked under his arm-pit and then hid himself inside the oceanic waters. Lord Viṣṇu, at the request of the Devas, incarnated as a Boar with a gigantic tusk, bent and protruding, chased the demon under the waters and forked the Earth out on the unique tusk.

(b) At the end of the last epoch, Known as 'Pādma Kalpa' (the current one is Sveta Varāha Kalpa) Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa assumed the form of the Primordial Boar

with the unique tusk, long and bent, and retrieved the Earth which had gone inside the watery expanse of the deluge.

aṟukal ilāya perum cīr amararkaḷ āti-mutalvaṉ;
karukiya nīla naṉ mēṉi vaṇṇaṉ; centāmaraik kaṇṇaṉ;
poru-ciṟaip puḷ uvantu ēṟum pūmakaḷār taṉik kēḷvaṉ;
orukatiyiṉ cuvai tantiṭṭu, oḻivu ilaṉ eṉṉōṭu uṭaṉē. (I–9–3)

Translation

Of auspicious qualities, undiminishing and eternal,
Of sapphire hue, the Primal Lord of the Celestials,
Of red-lotus eyes, with the bird (Garuḍa) as His vehicle, of hefty wings
Pūmakaḷār's (lotus-born Lakṣmī's peerless Consort stays)
Inside me, regaling me in a number of ways.

Note

It is a rich and varied fare that the Lord serves to the Āḻvār, having taken possession of him and shifted unto his body which now constitutes the seat of His entire cosmic activities. The Lord exhibits:

(a) His auspicious qualities, eternal and unlimited;

(b) His Overlordship of the Celestials in Heaven;

(c) His exquisite form of sapphire hue;

(d) His bewitching looks emanating from the red-lotus eyes, full of grace;

(e) Garuḍā, His mighty vehicle, with tough plumes;

(f) His Lordship of 'Śrī', the Divine Mother, the Goddess of affluence.

These correspond to the six rasas (appetisers) which enter our dishes, forming a well-integrated meal.

uṭaṉ amar kātal makaḷir tirumakaḷ maṇmakaḷ āyar
maṭa makaḷ eṉṟu ivar mūvar; āḷum ulakamum mūṉṟē;
uṭaṉ avai okka viḻuṅki, ālilaic cērntavaṉ emmāṉ,
kaṭal mali māyap perumāṉ, kaṇṇaṉ eṉ okkalaiyāṉē. (I–9–4)

Translation

My Lord's favourite spouses three
Are Tirumakaḷ, Maṇmakaḷ, Āyarmaṭamakaḷ; the worlds three
He rules over, He ate them up simultaneously
And on a fig-leaf, during deluge, lay;
Of wondrous deeds and glory, bigger than ocean,
Kaṇṇaṉ, my Liege-Lord is on my hip seated now.

Notes

(i) The Universal Lord sits on the hip of the Āḻvār even as He sat on the hip of Yaśōda, during His Avatāra. as Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

(ii) The three worlds referred to are the Svarga, up above, the Underworld, down below (Pāthāla) and the Earth, in between. The three Spouses of the Lord in His transcendental setting are: Śrī (Tirumakaḷ). Bhū (Maṇmakaḷ) and Nīla (Āyar maṭa makaḷ).

okkalai vaittu mulaippāl uṇ eṉṟu tantiṭa vāṅkic
cekkam ceka aṉṟu avaḷpāl uyir ceka uṇṭa perumāṉ;
nakka pirāṉōṭu ayaṉum intiraṉum mutalāka
okkavum tōṟṟiya īcaṉ māyaṉ eṉ neñciṉ uḷāṉē. (I-9-5)

Translation

The Supreme Lord Who created one and all-
Ayaṉ (Brahmā), Nakkapirāṉ (Rudra), Intiraṉ (Indra) and others of wondrous traits
And deeds-Who, sitting on the hip of that devil,
(Pūtanā), Sucked her breast and life alike, stays now in my heart.

māyaṉ eṉ neñciṉ uḷḷāṉ, maṟṟum evarkkum atuvē;
kāyamum cīvaṉum tāṉē; kālum eriyum avaṉē;
cēyaṉ, aṇiyaṉ, evarkkum cintaikkum kōcaram allaṉ;
tūyaṉ tuyakkaṉ mayakkaṉ eṉṉuṭait tōḻiṉaiyāṉē. (I-9-6)

Translation

Ha! right in my heart is Māyaṉ (the wonderful Lord),
As in the case of none else; body and soul, wind and fire,

He at once is; near (unto some) and yet far (unto others),
Beyond mental reach of one and all is my impeccable Lord,
(Unto the unfortunate sceptics), elusive and confounding,
He is now on my shoulders firmly mounted.

Notes

(i) The Supreme Lord controls the bodies of the different species of beings and the Souls inside them, the elements and all. Easily accessible to the devout who depend solely on His voluntary grace, He is beyond the comprehension of those who seek to know Him through their own efforts. Of easy grasp by the recipients of His grace, He is elusive unto others, who, by dint of their Kārmik influence, either doubt His very existence or comprehend Him the wrong way, as one on a par with other minor deities, as one without form and attributes, so on and so forth.

(ii) Speaking about clarity and confusion, precision and prevarication, in the above context, it is worth mentioning the following incident by way of illustrating that devotion and conviction go hand in hand and where devotion is wanting, there doubt, ignorance and bewilderment prevail.

(iii) Among the many listeners of Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar's scintillating discourses, there was a learned Pandit whom Bhaṭṭar, however, treated with no more than the barest ordinary courtesy. On the other hand, there was an aged Śrī Vaiṣṇava without any academic learning, whom Bhaṭṭar received with great respect and attention. A third party who felt puzzled over this marked disparity in treatment, and that too, in the reverse order, reverently approached Bhaṭṭar and prayed for clarification. Bhaṭṭar coolly replied, "You may come tomorrow as usual and watch. The parties in question will also come and I will tell you what it is". The morning came, the Pandit first came and paid obeisance to Bhaṭṭar who, however,

received him as usual with ordinary politeness; the third party was also with them by now, when Bhaṭṭar asked the learned Pandit: "Whom have you settled in your mind as the 'Paratattva' (ultimate Truth)?" The Pandit went about it, in a ponderous manner, full of doubts and uncertainty, quoting certain texts in favour of the Supremacy of Brahmā (who is but the demi-urge, the appointed agent for creation), some in favour of the overlordship of the All-pervading Viṣṇu and some others, establishing the Sovereign sway of Rudra (the appointed agent for destruction). Ultimately, he wound up by betraying his helplessness that, in the face of these conflicting texts, it would not be possible to arrive at any conclusion. At this stage, the aforesaid elderly person also arrived. Receiving him with great reverence, Bhaṭṭar asked: "Pray, who to you is the Ultimate Truth?" Pat came the reply, with pin-point precision: "I know of none other than Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, whom you discourse about, all these days; I also know of no other truth than what you preach to us daily, namely, Śrī Rāmānuja is my sole Saviour, the Means as well as the End of my salvation". Turning to the questioner of the previous day (third party) Bhaṭṭar said "I do hope You are now convinced that my attention to the elderly person is not misplaced. Now say, to whom I should bend". Need it be added that the questioner was fully satisfied?

tōḷ-iṇai mēlum, naṉ mārpiṉ mēlum, cuṭar-muṭi mēlum,
tāḷ-iṇai mēlum, puṉainta taṇ am tuḷāy uṭai ammāṉ,
kēḷ-iṇai oṉṟum ilātāṉ; kiḷarum cuṭar-oḷi mūrtti;
nāḷ aṇaintu oṉṟum akalāṉ; eṉṉuṭai nāviṉ uḷāṉē. (I–9–7)

Translation

With His shoulders, winsome chest, the lustrous crown
And feet, by tulaci, cool and nice, gaily adorned,

The peerless Lord of mounting radiance and glowing renown,
Tightens His hold on me, day by day, and now rests He in my
tongue.

Notes

(i) Even as the wife bedecks and beautifies herself to excite the special fascination of her husband, the Lord bedecks Himself with tulacī, which holds out special fascination for the Āḷvār and mingles with him.

(ii) The sequence of decoration indicated in the stanza is appreciated by Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar in his own inimitable way, as follows:

It is but meet, the great Warrior that the Lord is, He decorates first of all His sinewy shoulders bearing His weapons, namely, Conch and Discus; next comes the winsome chest, the seat of the Divine Mother, needing decoration for Her exhilaration; the crown comes thereafter only and the rest goes to the Lord's feet, always coveted by the devotees, where their salvation lies.

(iii) *Peerless Lord*: That the Lord is of incomparable excellence is brought out succinctly, later on, in III-1-2, the comparisons with lotus, gold etc, touching only a fringe of the subject. The things with which the Lord is compared actually suffer in comparison and lag far behind Him, rather pale into insignificance.

nāviṉuḷ niṉṟu malarum ñāṉak kalaikaḷukku ellām
āviyum ākkaiyum tāṉē; aḷippōtu aḷippavaṉ tāṉē;
pū iyal nāl-taṭam tōḷaṉ; poru paṭai āḻi caṅku ēntum
kāvi naṉ mēṉik kamalak kaṇṇaṉ; eṉ kaṇṇiṉ uḷāṉē. (I–9–8)

Translation

The arts, one and all, blossoming from the tongue,
Their body (sound) and soul (meaning),
Their exit and entrance are by Him Controlled,

Conch and Discus, His lovely shoulders four do sport,
The lotus-eyed of bewitching charm has my eyes entered.

Notes

(i) Certain branches of knowledge become extinct due to lack of propagation, due again to lack of interest or adequate intelligence to grasp them and various other causes; the Lord allows them to die out and gets them resuscitated, as and when He deems it necessary.

(ii) C.f. IV-2 and 3 of Bhagavad Gītā where Lord Kṛṣṇa says that the Karma Yoga, explained by Him long back to Vivaswat, by him to Manu,and by Manu to Ikṣvāku, was lost through long lapse of time and the same Yoga was again being taught by the Lord to Arjuna (at the appropriate time).

kamalak kaṇṇaṉ, eṉ kaṇṇiṉ uḷḷāṉ, kāṇpaṉ avaṉ kaṇkaḷālē;
amalaṅkaḷ āka viḻikkum; aimpulaṉum avaṉ mūrtti;
kamalattu ayaṉ nampi-taṉṉaik kaṇṇutalāṉoṭum tōṟṟi,
amalat teyvattoṭu ulakam ākki, eṉ neṟṟi uḷāṉē. (I-9-9)

Translation

The lotus-eyed Lord, right in my eyes,
Could by me be seen through His eyes,
Which destroyed my nescience and made.
All my senses five subserve Him; He made
The lotus-based Ayaṉ (Brahmā), Rudra, on whose forehead
Is an extra eye, other Devas and rest of the worlds,
(He of such eminence) is now right on my forehead.

Note

The Lord, hitherto not visible, could now be seen in all His grandeur and enjoyed by the Āḻvār, not only through his eyes but all his other senses as well. This was possible only due to the Lord's redemptive grace, shed in super-abundance through His benevolent looks. Finding that the Āḻvār could assimilate this grand experience, the Lord next passed

on to the Āḷvār's forehead on the penultimate lap of His Journey to the Āḷvār's crown.

neṟṟiyuḷ niṉṟu eṉṉai āḷum nirai malarp-pātaṅkaḷ cūṭik
kaṟṟait tuḷāy muṭik kōlak kaṇṇa-pirāṉait toḻuvār
oṟṟaip piṟai aṇintāṉum nāṉmukaṉum intiraṉum
maṟṟai amararum ellām; vantu eṉatu ucciyuḷāṉē. (I–9–10)

Translation

The lotus feet of the Lord, wearing round bands of tuḷacī dense,
Resting on my forehead, are worshipped and worn on their heads,
By the wearer of crescent Moon (Śiva), Nāṉmukaṉ (Brahmā), Intiraṉ (Indra)
And all other Amarar (Devas); Such an eminent One
Shot up from my forehead, right into my head.

Notes

(i) Even the exalted Śiva, Brahmā, Indra and other Devas have to queue up, seeking the appropriate time for the propitiation of the Lord. But He, in turn, has got into the Āḷvār's head, seeking the most appropriate time for it.

(ii) In the first line of this stanza (original text) reference has been made to the Lord's pair of lotus feet, planted on the Āḷvār's forehead, and these feet were worshipped by Śiva, Brahmā, Indra and other Devas and borne on their heads. This points to the insignia or the caste-mark worn by Śrī Vaiṣṇavites and from the wording of the stanza, it could be assumed that the Āḷvār bore, on his forehead, the Lord's pair of feet with a lotus base and not a single foot alone, as a section of Śrī Vaiṣṇavites has chosen to depict.

ucciyuḷḷē niṟkum tēva tēvaṟkuk kaṇṇa-pirāṉukku
iccaiyuḷ cella uṇartti, vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
ic coṉṉa ayirattuḷḷē ivaiyum ōr pattu empirāṟku
niccalum viṇṇappam ceyya nīḷ kaḻal ceṉṉi porumē. (I–9–11)

Translation

The Lord's longish feet will for ever crown
The heads of those who (but once) recite these songs ten,
Out of the thousand sung by Caṭakōpaṉ of Kurukūr, narrating
Just as he experienced, how Kaṇṇapirāṉ, the Supreme Lord, migrated from one limb of his to another and alighted on his crown.

Note

The Supreme Lord, adorning the heads of the exalted Devas, coveted the Āḻvār's head so much that He got into it by stages, and there being no higher place to step into, the Lord stays on there. In other words, the Āḻvār's head is the new abode of the Lord. This is indeed the limit for the Lord's loving condescension (Sauśīlya)! Here then is the mystic realisation that God loves His Subjects in the same way they pine for union with Him.

First Centum–Tenth Decad (I-10)
(Poru mā nīḷ paṭai)

Preamble

In this decad, the Lord's voluntary or spontaneous grace is prominently brought out and extolled by the Āḻvār. Some Ācāryas, however, hold that the Āḻvār gives vent to his boundless joy resulting from the Lord's contact with him, limb by limb, mentioned in the preceding decad. The remarkable approach of Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, that intellectual giant of extraordinary divine fervour to this decad is as follows:

In the preceding decad, the Supreme Lord was shown to have finally got on to the Āḻvār's head. Could there be any mystic experience more exalted than this? It was now up to the Lord to keep it up without once again snatching Himself away from the Āḻvār. That apart, the highest bliss, thus conferred by the Lord on the Āḻvār, led him on, to an introspection as to how he came by it. A thread-bare analysis of his own attainments reveals that he has none whatsoever and, at best, it could be said that he was God-bent

and free from hatred for Him. Can it be said that a lemon fruit has secured a Kingdom, simply because a subject reverently placed a lemon fruit at the feet of a munificent King and got a liberal gift of territory, at the King's pleasure? It is absolutely impossible, rather, it would be preposterous to correlate the slender means of the Individual, as good as non-existent, with the 'End', of mighty dimensions, as in the example cited above. Verily, the Lord is the root-cause even for the little merit, if any, acquired by the Individual, down the ages, as the latter was dowered with body and limbs, and put on a career of useful activity, only by Him. And so, the present ecstatic experience of the Āḷvār is traceable only to the Lord's redemptive grace and, little wonder, the Āḷvār thaws down in grateful acknowledgement of the Lord's benefaction, totally unrelated to the merit in him.

It will be seen from the above exposition that Bhaṭṭar lays emphasis on the Lord's redemptive grace besides sharing the view of the other Ācāryas, so far as the Āḷvār's ecstatic experience is concerned.

poru mā nīḷ paṭai āḻi caṅkattoṭu
tiru mā nīḷ kaḻal ēḻ ulakum toḻa,
oru māṇik kuṟaḷ āki, nimirnta ak
karu māṇikkam eṉ kaṇṇuḷatu ākumē. (I–10–1)

Translation

The peerless Vamāna bearing the martial conch and discus,
The majestic weapons, Whose feet, long and lovely,
All the seven worlds worshipped, as He grew into space,
That blue-gem of a Lord is unto me visible!

Note

Even in his dreams, Mahābali had not conjured up the vision of the charming Lord presenting Himself before him, in all His grandeur and asking for a gift. Likewise, the Āḷvār had not the remotest idea that the Lord would ever come to him and reveal His exquisite charm to his naked eyes. No wonder then, he goes into raptures over the Lord's spontaneous grace. This is indeed the key stanza for this decad.

kaṇṇuḷḷē niṟkum-kātaṉmaiyāl toḻil-
eṇṇilum varum; eṉ iṉi vēṇṭuvam-
maṇṇum nīrum eriyum nal vāyuvum
viṇṇumāy viriyum em pirāṉaiyē? (I-10-2)

Translation

My Lord hath as His body the elements five
And as the sprawling Universe expands; worshipped with love
He makes Himself visible, nay, for the mere count.
What more does one (for salvation) want?

Notes

(i) It is by no means surprising that the Lord Who is bound by the deep love of the devotees, always keeps Himself in their vicinity. But the Āḻvār now touches upon the Lord's overwhelming generosity in presenting Himself even to those who utter the number twentysix, in the course of casual enumeration. The non-sentient body has 24 ingredients, such as Mind, senses, tanmātrās etc; the sentient soul which takes possession of the body and directs it, is the 25th tattva (principle) and the Lord is the 26th tattva, controlling, as He does, both the body and the Soul which constitute, as it were, His bodies. This explains the significance of number 26, denoting the Lord.

(ii) The Āḻvār exclaims: "When the Lord can be got at even by casual enumeration, what more do we need for our salvation?" By this, he means that God's grace is the sole means of salvation and nothing is needed on our part. There are no special conditions supporting His grace which operates unasked and unaided. What is wanted is non-resistance or non-rejection when Grace is offered. When it was pointed out to the great Ācārya, Nampiḷḷai, by one of his disciples, named, Vēlveṭṭiṟpiḷḷai that Śrī Rāma offered Śaraṇāgati to the king of the oceans, facing east and observing other ritualistic formalities, the learned Preceptor elucidated that it was done so by Śrī Rāma as a matter of course, in keeping with his orthodox

background and not as something mandatory. As a matter of fact, Śrī Rāma resorted to the said 'Śaraṇāgati' only on the advice of Vibhīṣaṇa who, however, did not have a single dip in the ocean before he sought asylum at the feet of Śrī Rāma. The lesson to be learnt from this contrasting picture is that 'Śaraṇāgati' (surrender to the Lord's loving grace) could be performed in any manner, with or without a bath, the one who hasn't had his bath already, not being under any compulsion to take a bath and, conversely, the one who has had his bath already, need not defile himself by way of emulating the former.

em pirāṉai, entai tantai tantaikkum
tampirāṉai, taṉ-tāmaraik kaṇṇaṉai,
kompu arāvu nuṇ nēr iṭai mārpaṉai,
em pirāṉait toḻāy, maṭa neñcamē. (I–10–3)

Translation

My docile mind! bow unto the Benefactor great
Of our entire clan, the lotus-eyed Lord,
Shedding cool grace, bearing on His winsome chest,
The Mother Divine, lovely and thin-waisted.

Note

The Lord's tender solicitude for the devotees, overlooking their countless transgressions, springs from His close contact with the Divine Mother who is the very personification of grace.

neñcamē! nallai! nallai! uṉṉaip peṟṟāl
eṉ ceyyōm? iṉi eṉṉa kuṟaiviṉam?
maintaṉai malarāḷ maṇavāḷaṉait
tuñcumpōtum viṭātu toṭar kaṇṭāy. (I–10–4)

Translation

Well done, my mind! what is there
We can't secure when you are here?
Well, is there anything we would want anymore?

Malarāḷ's (Lotus-born Lakṣmī's) Consort, ever young,
Leave not, even if you find me straying.

Note

The Āḻvār's mind exhorted by him in the preceding stanza to worship the Lord, responded so well that he now pats it on its back and prays that it shall cling to the Lord under all circumstances. The Āḻvār apprehends the off-chance of his shrinking back from the Lord once again, when his own humility haunts him, in dire contrast to the Lord's overwhelming superiority. Right now, the Āḻvār counsels his mind, never to get parted from the Lord, whatever might be his own vicissitudes.

kaṇṭāyē, neñcē! karumaṅkaḷ vāykkiṉṟu ōr
eṉ tāṉum iṉṟiyē vantu iyalumāṟu;
uṇṭāṉai ulaku ēḻum ōr mūvaṭi
koṇṭāṉaik kaṇṭukoṇṭaṉai nīyumē. (I–10–5)

Translation

Haven't you seen, my mind! how things occur,
With no pre-thoughts in us? did the worlds seven
Know that the Lord would, during deluge, sustain
Them all? Who knew that the Lord would measure
The worlds in three strides and set His feet on them?
Well, did you ever know that you would see Him?

Note

The Lord extends His grace out of His own sweet will, unasked and un-premeditated by us. It is this spontaneous grace of the Lord that Bhaṭṭar has emphasised all along in this decad.

nīyum nāṉum in nērniṟkil, mēl maṟṟōr
nōyum cārkoṭāṉ; neñcamē! coṉṉēṉ:
tāyum tantaiyum āy, iv ulakiṉil
vāyum īcaṉ, maṇivaṇṇaṉ entaiyē. (I–10–6)

Translation

My mind! if you and I continue in this state,
Our sapphire—hued Lord, Master of all,
Who is our Father and Mother as well,
Will rid us of all ills, let me truly state.

Note

Addressing his mind, the Āḻvār says: " Our eternal Lord Who endears Himself to us like the Mother, whose love is proverbial, chastises like the Father, bent upon reforming us, revealed His resplendent form like unto a sapphire and enthralled me. If you and I persevere in this state, the Lord will see to it that we enjoy this perennial bliss for all time, keeping away all ills and evils ".

entaiyē! eṉṟum, em perumāṉ! eṉṟum,
cintaiyuḷ vaippaṉ, colluvaṉ, pāviyēṉ-
entai! em perumāṉ! eṉṟu vāṉavar
cintaiyuḷ vaittuc collum celvaṉaiyē. (I–10–7)

Translation

The Sovereign Lord, the Celestials contemplate
And sing His glory as their Progenitor (Primate);
How dare I, a sinner, likewise meditate
And call Him my Father, my Master and all that?

Note

The Scriptures warn that one shall not utter anything ominous (inauspicious), lest it should actually come to pass. In the fourth stanza of this decad, the Āḻvār, while exhorting his mind, apprehended the frightful possibility of his moving away from the Lord, haunted by his own lowliness. And here we find him suffering from that obsession again and so soon!

celva nāraṇaṉ eṉṟa col kēṭṭalum,
malkum kaṇ paṉi; nāṭuvaṉ, māyamē!
allum naṉ pakalum iṭaiviṭu iṉṟi
nalki, eṉṉai viṭāṉ, nampi nampiyē. (I–10–8)

Translation

'Celvanāraṇaṉ,' the word uttered by some one,
Heard I, and lo! with tears my eyes did run;
Searched I whither He is gone, oh, what a marvel!
Thro' friendly days and nights with no interval,
The perfect Lord, full of grace, tries to win
My love and elects with me ever to remain.

Note

"How unworthy and unbecoming," the Āḻvār rattled, "would be the union of one so vile and abject like me and the Supreme Lord, pure and exalted beyond words!" And so, he fled away and hid himself behind a ruined wall, in a remote corner, with little or no scope of hearing and talking about God-head. Thus he would forget all about God and, as a further precaution against possible detection and intrusion on his privacy, he even put a veil over his head. But what happened? A wayfarer, with a heavy headload, rested a while there, after unburdening himself. While discharging the load, he ejaculated 'Śrīman Nārāyaṇa'! in a relaxing mood. The moment this magic word struck the ears of the Āḻvār, he got himself transformed into the ecstatic state, described in this stanza, as above. The Saint was indeed most agreeably surprised that the Lord should shed on him His grace and affection in such super-abundance and reclaim him despite his determination to forget all about Him, for fear of tainting Him. Oh, what a grip the Lord has over His chosen subjects!

nampiyai, teṉ kuṟuṅkuṭi niṉṟa, ac
cempoṉē tikaḻum tiru mūrttiyai,
umpar vāṉavar āti am cōtiyai,
em pirāṉai, eṉ colli maṟappanō ? (I–10–9)

Translation

On what pretext shall I forget my Lord of dazzling charm,
The Progenitor of the exalted denizens of heaven,

The perfect Lord Who, in Tentirukkuṟuṅkuṭi stands
With an exquisite Form that does like red gold gleam?

Notes

(i) Asked whether he would not forget the Lord like the worldlings and go in pursuit of food and raiment, the Āḷvār says, he just does not know how and on what grounds he can forget the Lord. By exhibiting His exquisite charm in His Arcā form at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi (deep down, in Tamil Nadu), He enthralled the Āḷvār. How then could he forget Him? Could it be on the ground that He is not perfect, that He is not near at hand, that His form is not attractive, that He is not exalted, that He does not extend any benefits? No, none of these grounds will hold good, as could be seen from this stanza.

(ii) The Lord, in His Arcā (Iconic) form in Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi, is referred to as the perfect one in whom all the auspicious qualities converge in a perfect measure. No doubt, the qualities of saulabhya (easy accessibility), Sauśīlya (condescension), Vātsalya (tender solicitude) etc. are also displayed by the Lord in His 'Para' or transcendent form in the High Heavens. But, in that land of perfect bliss and perpetual splendour, these qualities can be hardly perceptible in such a marked degree as they are in this land of darkness, delusion and despair. There is all the difference between a light burning in broad day light and the one shining forth in a dark room. (Īṭu)

maṟappum ñāṉamum nāṉ oṉṟu uṇarntilaṉ;
maṟakkum eṉṟu centāmaraik kaṇṇoṭu,
maṟappu aṟa, eṉ uḷḷē maṉṉiṉāṉ taṉṉai
maṟappanō, iṉi yāṉ eṉ maṇiyaiyē? (I–10–10)

Translation

I know not what it is to feel or forget
And yet, the Lord, with red-lotus-eyes, does apprehend

That I'll forget Him and, as one forewarned,
He has lodged Himself firm in my heart;
The gem of a Lord, shall I any more forget?

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār feels that he is incapable of thinking and there is, therefore, no question of his forgetting either. The Lord is, however, anxious that the knowledge now dawned on the Āḻvār as a result of His union with him, should remain intact, leaving no more scope for his sliding down or slipping off. He has, therefore, lodged Himself firmly inside the Āḻvār, casting His benevolent glances on him.

(ii) Who will cast away a priceless gem when it comes to one's hand, instead of treasuring it and enjoying it all the time?

maṇiyai, vāṉavar kaṇṇaṉai, taṉṉatu ōr
aṇiyai, teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col-
paṇi cey āyirattuḷ ivai pattuṭaṉ
taṇivilar kaṟparēl, kalvi vāyumē. (I-10-11)

Translation

Those that learn with zeal and thirst insatiable these songs ten,
Out of the thousand sung by Tenkurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
As a matter of service unto the Lord of sapphire hue,
Himself a jewel unique, overlord of the Celestials,
Will with knowledge divine be filled.

Notes

(i) In accordance with the text of the song, those that learn these ten songs will have their fill of knowledge. The ultimate aim of knowledge is Divine Service and so, this knowledge should blossom into service.

(ii) The blue-gem is likened to the Lord in a number of ways. In it, there is a happy blending, as in the case of the supreme Lord, of ' Paratva ' and ' Saulabhya ', the two extremes of paramountcy and simplicity. With all its high intrinsic value, the gem can be easily carried, tied at one end of the garment ".

(iii) It is common knowledge that jewels beautify the wearer. In the case of the Lord, however, He beautifies the jewels worn by Him and He is Himself the most attractive of all jewels.

THE CENTUM, IN RETROSPECT (DECAD-WISE SUMMARY)

(I-1): Right in the opening line of the first song of the first decad, Saint Nammāḻvār characterises God as one with perfections, all of the nature of inexhaustible bliss and love, the natural repository of innumerable auspicious traits of unlimited dimensions. The Āḻvār gratefully revels in the blissful knowledge of the Supreme Lord, shorn of all doubts, discrepancies and deviations, dowered on him by the Lord Himself, in the exercise of His spontaneous grace and exhorts his mind to take refuge in the Lord's distress-dispelling, dazzling feet, being the sure and certain means of salvation. The Lord's greatness and transcedent glory, elucidated in the *opening decad* have been briefly set out below. He is at once the Material Cause as well as the Operative Cause and Instrumental Cause of all life and being; He is the one and only Giver either directly or through other minor deities, whose favours their respective votaries seek; He is all-pervading like the Soul inside the body;

(I-2): Far from being selfish and self-centred, the Āḻvār wishes to share with his fellow beings, wallowing in the stye of wordly life, all that knowledge graciously dowered on him by the Lord. He, therefore, exhorts them, *in the second decad*, to give up the elusive and obnoxious pleasures of worldly life, disengage themselves from the erroneous notions of 'I' and 'Mine' and dedicate themselves to the appreciation of the limitless wealth and splendour of the Supreme Lord, thereby reaping the rich harvest of eternal bliss and beatitude. True renunciation is of the mind, as distinguished from mere bodily replacements, such as living a secluded life in a remote forest. In this, his first address to the fellow-beings, the Āḻvār also teaches them how and where to pray, by giving out the substance of the eight-syllabled 'Tirumantra'— Aum Namo (Nārāyaṇāya);

(I-3): Lest his addressees in the preceding decad be scared of the Lord's sovereignty as the Supreme Master of the whole universe, the Āḻvār puts them at ease by depicting, *in the third decad*, the Lord's disarming simplicity and His easy-accessibility (Saulabhya) and emphasising that, to those who turn their minds unto Him, He is easily accessible but difficult of attainment by others;

(I-4): *In the fourth decad*, the Āḻvār is seen transformed (figuratively of course) as a 'Nāyakī' (female lover) pining for immediate union with the Supreme Lord and sending some birds, as her emissaries, to the Lord reclining on the 'Milk-occan', the seat of the Lord's creative activity, invoking His trait of forgiveness (aparāda sahatva). (The winged birds typify the efficient preceptors, possessed of the mighty wings of knowledge (Jñāna) and conduct (anuṣṭāna), a happy blending of both. (This is the first of four such decads in the entire hymnal, the other three being VI-1, VI-8 and IX-7.)

(I-5): The Saint brings into focus, the Lord's trait of loving condescension (Sauśīlya) or mixing freely with the lowliest, *in the fifth decad;* the Lord, bent

upon having a rapport with the Āḷvār, shakes off the latter's inferiority complex inducing him, quite often, to retreat from the Lord for fear of defiling One, so exalted.

(I-6): The Lord's 'Svārādhatva' (easy worshippability) is emphasised *in the sixth decad;* the outward offerings may be trifles but, in God's eyes, they carry much weight, when offered in humility, with loving devotion;

(I-7): Easy-worshippability apart, the Lord is highly adorable because of His extraordinary sweetness; this is highlighted by the Āḷvār, *in the seventh decad;*

(I-8): *In the eighth decad*, the Āḷvār brings to the fore, the Lord's trait of uprightness (ārjava or rujuh) His transparence in word, deed and thought, free from sophistry, duplicity, mental reservation, mischievous distortion, etc.;

(I-9): The Omniscient Lord regulates the influx of His grace in such a manner that the recipient is able to stomach it all right. *In the ninth decad*, as well as the fifth decad of the fourth centum, according to the Āḷvār's own admission, the Lord unfolds unto him, His glorious traits and wondrous deeds, only by stages, consistent with his capacity for in-take (Sātmia bhoga pradatva). Being the last of the staggering series of bodies donned by the Āḷvār, in which alone the Lord could reclaim him, He naturally covets his body. And yet, He would not jump straightaway into the crown of the Āḷvār's head; He would first stand close to him, get into his hip and thence move upwards, limb by limb. Had the Lord not adopted this process of gradual occupation of the Āḷvār's body, the latter would have just collapsed, like unto a pauper from birth, who suddenly comes by a sizeable treasure;

(I-10): *In the concluding) decad of this centum*, the Lord's voluntary or spontaneous grace (nirhetuka kṛpā) is brought out prominently and extolled by the Āḷvār who also gives vent to his boundless joy resulting from the Lord's contact with him, limb by limb, as set out in the ninth decad.